



BY THE AUTHOR OF 'LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET'

# ONLY A CLOD



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A Novel

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET,” “AURORA FLOYD,”  
“ISHMAEL,” “VIXEN,” “LONDON PRIDE,”

ETC., ETC.

Stereotyped Edition

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## CONTENTS.

| CHAPTER.   | PAGE |
|--|------|
| I. THE MASTER . . . . .                                    | 5    |
| II. THE MAN . . . . .                                      | 11   |
| III. TIDINGS OF HOME . . . . .                             | 14   |
| IV. TREDETHLYN'S LUCK . . . . .                            | 17   |
| V. COMING HOME . . . . .                                   | 26   |
| VI. THE END OF THE WORLD . . . . .                         | 32   |
| VII. MAUDE HILLARY'S ADORERS . . . . .                     | 42   |
| VIII. AT THE CHATEAU DE BOURBON . . . . .                  | 50   |
| IX. JULIA DESMOND MAKES HERSELF AGREEABLE . . . . .        | 53   |
| X. COLTONSLOUGH . . . . .                                  | 62   |
| XI. A VERY OLD STORY . . . . .                             | 69   |
| XII. A MODERN GENTLEMAN'S DIARY . . . . .                  | 80   |
| XIII. CAUGHT IN THE TOILS . . . . .                        | 94   |
| XIV. VERY PRIVATE THEATRICALS . . . . .                    | 100  |
| XV. A COMMERCIAL ORISIS . . . . .                          | 108  |
| XVI. A DRAMA THAT WAS ACTED BEHIND THE SCENES . . . . .    | 123  |
| XVII. SOMETHING LIKE FRIENDSHIP . . . . .                  | 139  |
| XVIII. POOR FRANCIS . . . . .                              | 143  |
| XIX. MR. HILLARY SPEAKS HIS MIND . . . . .                 | 151  |
| XX. AN EXPLANATION . . . . .                               | 166  |
| XXI. HARCOURT LOWTHER'S WELCOME . . . . .                  | 161  |
| XXII. TAKING IT QUIETLY . . . . .                          | 167  |
| XXIII. TIDINGS OF SUSAN . . . . .                          | 176  |
| XXIV. FRANCIS TREDETHLYN'S DISINTERESTED ADVISER . . . . . | 190  |
| XXV. THE ROAD TO RUIN . . . . .                            | 196  |
| XXVI. A CHILLING RECONCILIATION . . . . .                  | 203  |
| XXVII. SEEING A GHOST . . . . .                            | 211  |
| XXVIII. "OH, MY AMY! MINE NO MORE!" . . . . .              | 219  |
| XXIX. ENTANGLEMENTS IN THE WEB . . . . .                   | 232  |
| XXX. THE TWO ANTIPHOLI . . . . .                           | 238  |
| XXXI. THE DIPLOMATIST'S POLICY . . . . .                   | 243  |
| XXXII. HARCOURT GATHERS HIS FIRST FRUITS . . . . .         | 253  |
| XXXIII. ROSA'S REVELATIONS . . . . .                       | 266  |
| XXXIV. THE LADY AT PETERSHAM . . . . .                     | 279  |
| XXXV. A HASTY RECKONING . . . . .                          | 287  |
| XXXVI. POOR FRANK'S LETTER . . . . .                       | 296  |
| XXXVII. ELEANOR DROPS IN UPON ROSAMOND . . . . .           | 302  |
| XXXVIII. GONE . . . . .                                    | 310  |
| XXXIX. TOO LATE . . . . .                                  | 317  |
| XL. AN IGNOMINIOUS FAILURE . . . . .                       | 322  |
| XLI. SUSAN'S GOOD NEWS . . . . .                           | 331  |
| XLII. A PERFECT UNION . . . . .                            | 341  |



# ONLY A CLOD

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE MASTER.

ENSIGN HAROURT LOWTHER, of her Majesty's 51st Light Infantry, sat staring out into his garden at Port Arthur, watching a couple of convict gardeners—who were going about their work with a monotonous and exasperating deliberation of movement—and lamenting the evil fortune that had stationed him in his present quarters. He had a great many troubles, this elegant young ensign, who was, for the time being, destined to bloom unseen, and waste the graces that ought to have adorned Belgravia upon the desert air of the island of Tasmania. He had, as he himself elegantly expressed it, no end of troubles. First and foremost, his cigar would not draw; and as it was the last of a case of choice cabanas, the calamity was not a small one. Secondly, there had been a drought in fair Van Diemen's Land for the last month or so. The verdure was growing brown and leathery; the feathery masses of the tall fern shrivelled at the edges like scorched paper; the stiff foliage of the cedars seemed to rattle as it shook in the dry, dust-laden wind, and the thermometer stood at a hundred and ten in the shade; true, it might drop forty degrees or so at any moment, with the uprising of a moist breeze from the sea, but, pending the arrival of that auspicious moment, Mr. Lowther was in a very bad temper. What had he done that he should be stationed in a convict settlement, with no chance of any gain or glory as compensation for his trials; with no one to speak to except a prosy old police-magistrate or a puritanical chaplain; with nothing better to look at than the eternal blue of the ocean, or a whaling vessel anchored in the bay; with nothing to listen to except the clanking of hammers and banging of timber and jingling of iron in the busy dockyard; with no better enjoyment to hope for than a couple of days' quail-shooting or kangaroo-hunting in the interior?

"If I'd been Desperate Bill the Burglar, or Slippery Steeve the Smasher, I couldn't be *much* worse off," he muttered, as he

gave up the unmanageable cigar, and went across the room to a table, upon which there were some tobacco-jars and meerschaum pipes. "Now, then, Tredethlyn, are those boots ready?"

This question was addressed to an invisible some one, whose low whistling of a jovial Irish air was audible from the adjoining room.

"Yes, captain," answered a cheery voice—the whistler had broken off in the middle of the "wild sweet briery fence that around the flowers of Erin dwells,"—"yes, captain, quite ready."

"That's another aggravation," exclaimed Mr. Lowther,—"the fellow will call me captain; as if it wasn't an underhand way of reminding me that for a poor devil like me there's no chance of promotion."

"But you see you *are* captain here, Mr. Lowther," said the whistler, emerging from the adjoining chamber with a pair of newly-blacked Wellingtons in his hand; "you're captain, major, colonel, general, and field-marshal, all in one here, with seventy men under your control, and any amount of convicts to look after."

"If there's one thing in the world that's more excruciating than another, it's that fellow's cheerfulness," cried Mr. Lowther. I can fancy the feelings of an elegant young French marquis of the *vieille roche*, a scion of the Mortemars or Birons, buried alive in an underground cell in the Bastille, with a lively commoner for his companion—a cheerful *bourgeois*, who pretended to make light of his situation, and eat his mouldy bread with a relish. "Now, then, Tredethlyn, where are the boot-hooks? That fellow always forgets something."

"That fellow," otherwise Francis Tredethlyn, was a tall, stalwart private soldier, of some seven-and-twenty years of age, who had been honoured by an appointment to the post of valet and butler to Ensign Harcourt Lowther.

If the stalwart soldier had not been blest with one of those imperturbable Mark-Tapley-like tempers, which resemble the patent elliptic springs of a crack coachbuilder's carriage, and can convey the traveller unjolted and uninjured over the roughest roads in the journey of life, he might have found his position as valet, major-domo, and occasional confidant to Harcourt Lowther, far from the pleasantest berth to be had in this great tempest-tossed vessel which we call the world. But Francis Tredethlyn's serenity of disposition was proof against the most wearisome burden a man is ever called upon to bear—the companionship of a discontented fellow-creature, and all the variable moods, from a feverish cynical kind of gaiety to a dreary and ill-tempered gravity, which were engendered out of that perpetual discontent.

But Frank Tredethlyn bore it all cheerfully; with a manly,

open-hearted cheerfulness that had no taint of sycophancy. If the young ensign wanted to talk to him, well and good—he was ready and willing to talk about any thing or every thing; but he had his own sentiments upon most subjects, which sentiments were of a very fast colour, and did not take any reflected hue from Mr. Lowther's aristocratical opinions.

It is not to be supposed that Francis Tredethlyn, private soldier and valet, had any claims to intellectual equality with his master. The private wrote a fair commercial hand, very bold and big and resolute-looking; could read aloud without stumbling ignominiously over the long words; could cast up accounts; and, looking back at the history of the universal past, saw glimmering faintly over a sea of darkness and oblivion such beacon-lights as a Norman invasion; a solemn meeting on the flat turf of Runnymede; a Reformation, with a good deal of martyr-burning and head-chopping attendant thereupon; a fiery hook-nosed Dutch liberator, a Jacobite rebellion, and a Reform Bill. Beyond these limits the attainments of Mr. Tredethlyn did not extend; and the ensign, when grumbling at the general discomfort of his life, was apt to say that it was a hard thing to be flung for companionship on a fellow who was nothing but a boor and a clod.

Mr. Lowther treated his valet very much as a spoiled child treats her doll; sometimes it pleased him to be monstrously cordial and familiar with his attendant, while at another time he held Francis aloof by a haughty reserve of manner, beyond which barrier the other made no effort to penetrate.

"The fellow does possess that merit," Harcourt Lowther said sometimes, "he knows how to keep his place."

The fact of the matter is, the valet was infinitely less dependent upon his master's companionship than his master upon his. There were a hundred ways in which Francis Tredethlyn could amuse himself; and there was not a cloud in the sky, a wave of the sea, a leaf in the garden, out of which he could not take some scrap of pleasure, and which had not a deeper and truer meaning for him than for the idle young officer who lay yawning upon his narrow couch with his feet in the air, and nothing better to do than to admire the shape of his boots, obtained on credit from a confiding West-end tradesman. Francis had that wide sympathy with his fellow-creatures which is a special attribute of some men; and was on the friendliest possible terms with the two convict gardeners, both of whom had achieved some renown as the most incorrigible and execrable specimens of the criminal class. Every dog in the little settlement fawned upon Frank Tredethlyn, and ran to rub his head against his knees, and slaver his hand with its flapping tongue. He had made a kennel for two or three of these canine

acquaintances in a shady corner of the big garden, much to the disgust and annoyance of the ensign, who only cared for such dogs as are calculated to assist the sports of their lord and master. Staghounds and beagles, foxhounds and harriers, setters, pointers, and retrievers, clever ratting Scotch terriers, well-bred and savage bulls, even little short-eared toy terriers, or fawn-coloured and black-muzzled pugs, were all very well placed in the scheme of creation: but Mr. Lowther could find no explanation for the existence of those mongrel creatures who seem to have nothing to do in the world but to attach themselves with slavish devotion to some brutal master, or to lie in the most disreputable courts and alleys of a city in hot weather and catch flies.

But, somehow or other, Francis Tredehlyn seemed generally to do pretty much as he liked, in spite of military despotism and Mr. Harcourt Lowther. The dogs were unmolested in their shady corner; and the ensign was so good as to say that a little aviary of wicker-work and wire, which Tredehlyn constructed in his leisure hours, and duly filled with tiny feathered inhabitants, that kept up a faint twittering in the sunshine, was an improvement to the cottage. Francis was very handy, and could do wonders with a hammer and a handful of tin tacks; and was, indeed, altogether a great acquisition to his master, as Mr. Corbett, the police-magistrate, sometimes remarked to Harcourt Lowther.

"Yes," Harcourt answered, indifferently, "the fellow is a cut above most of his class. He is a Cornishman, it seems, and the son of a small farmer in that land of Tre, Pol, and Pen; and he tells me that he has an old miser uncle who is supposed to be preternaturally rich. Egad! I wish I had such an uncle! All my uncles are misers for the matter of that; but then, unluckily, the poor devils are misers because they're preternaturally poor."

Mr. Lowther stood before the little looking-glass, in the sunny window, admiring himself, while Francis Tredehlyn helped him on with his coat. He was going to dine with Mr. Corbett the magistrate, and to spend the evening in the society of Miss Corbett, who had come out to the colony with the idea that general officers and wealthy judges would be waiting on the shore ready to conduct her from the place of debarkation to the hymeneal altar, and had been a little soured by the disenchantment which had too surely followed her arrival. She was a gushing damsel of thirty-five, very tall and square, and of a prevailing drab colour; and she played tremendous variations of shrill Scottish melodies on a piano which had been warranted to preserve its purity of tone in any climate, but upon which the nearest thing to an harmonious octave was a wild stretch of

thirteen notes. Mr. Lowther must have been very low in the world when he had nothing better to do than to sit by Miss Corbett's piano while she banged and rattled at the numerous disguises under which "Kinloch of Kinloch" appeared in a fantasia of twelve pages, now prancing jauntily in triplets, now rushing up and down the piano in chromatic scales, now scampering wildly in double arpeggios, now banging himself out of all knowledge in common chords, or wailing dismally in a hideous minor. Fate had done its worst for Ensign Lowther, when he had no better amusement than to lounge by the side of that ill-used old instrument, staring reflectively at the thin places on the top of Miss Corbett's drab-coloured head.

Harcourt Lowther stood before the glass admiring his handsome face, while his valet brushed the collar of his coat. Well, he had a right to admire himself! If Providence had treated him badly, capricious Mother Nature, who, like any other frivolous-minded parent, elects her prime favourites without rhyme or reason, had been very bountiful to him in the matter of an aquiline nose, a finely-modelled mouth and chin, and deep womanish blue eyes, with a shimmer of gold on their lashes. No one could deny Mr. Lowther's claim to be considered a remarkably handsome man, an elegant young man, a very agreeable and accomplished gentleman. The world, of course, had nothing to do with that rougher edge of the ensign's character which he turned to his valet Francis Tredehlyn in his cottage at Port Arthur.

He went out presently, swinging his thin cane, and whistling all the triplets and cadences of an elaborate *scena*; he was an amateur musician and an amateur artist, playing more or less upon two or three different instruments, and painting more or less in half-a-dozen different styles. He could ride across country to the astonishment of burly Leicestershire squires, who were inclined to think contemptuously of his small waist and pretty blue eyes, his amber-tinted, jockey-club perfumed whiskers, trim tops, and unstained "pink." He was a good shot, and long ago at Harrow had been renowned as a cricketer. He spoke three or four modern languages, and had that dim recollection of his classic studies which is sufficient for a man of the world who knows how to make much out of little. He was altogether a very accomplished gentleman; but with him intellectual pursuits were a means rather than an end, and he took very little pleasure in the society of books or bookmen. He wanted to be in the world, foremost in the perpetual strife, amid the crash of drums and trumpets, the roaring of cannon, and glitter of emblazoned standards flaunting gallantly in the wind. He wanted to be one of the conquerors in the universal tournament, and to ride up to the Queen of Beauty flushed and triumphant after

the strife, to be admired and caressed. This is why the inaction of his present existence was so utterly intolerable to him. He had a supreme belief in himself, and in the indisputable nature of his right to the best and brightest amongst earth's prizes. The time must be indeed out of joint in which there was nothing better for such as he than a dreary convict settlement in the island of Tasmania.

Unluckily, the time *was* out of joint. Robert Lowther, of Lowther Hall, Hampshire, had given his younger son an aristocratic name and a gentlemanly education; and then, having nothing more to bestow upon him, had been forced to leave the lad to fish for himself in the troubled waters of life. The prospects of the junior had always been more or less sacrificed to those of the senior of Robert Lowther's two sons, and Harcourt bore a hearty grudge against his father and his brother on this account. Plainly told that he was to expect no more assistance from the parent purse, the young man had elected to become a barrister; but after a three years' course of reading, in which the cultivation of light literature and modern languages was diversified by a slight sprinkling of legal study, he had grown heartily sick of his shabbily-furnished third floor in Hare Court, Temple, and had gladly accepted the price of a commission in one of Her Majesty's light infantry regiments from an affectionate maiden aunt, believing that the regiment would be speedily under orders for India, where glory and loot no doubt awaited a dashing young soldier with a very high opinion of his own merits.

Unhappily for Mr. Lowther the regiment did not go to India; but he and his captain, with a detachment of seventy rank and file, embarked at Deptford on a misty morning in October, in charge of 450 convicts bound for Hobart Town. At the time of which I write the ensign had been nearly a twelvemonth in Van Diemen's Land, and before him lay the prospect of another dreary year which must elapse before there was much chance of his seeing a change of quarters. There are some people who take their troubles with a cheerful countenance and make the best of a bad bargain; but Mr. Lowther was not one of them. He had begun to grumble before the convict ship left Deptford; and he had gone on complaining, with very little intermission, until to-day, and was likely so to continue until the end of the chapter. Napoleon at St. Helena could scarcely have felt his exile more keenly; nor could that fallen hero have more bitterly resented the injustice of his fate than Harcourt Osborne Lowther, who believed that there must be something radically wrong in a universe in which there was no provision of 40,000*l.* or so a year for an elegant young man with a perfect aquiline nose, a clear ringing touch upon the piano, a trumpet tone on the flute, a

talent for taking pen-and-ink portraits that were equal to anything of Count D'Orsay's, and an irreproachable taste in waistcoats.

He went out now in very tolerable spirits; first, because he had worked himself into a good temper by grumbling to himself and Tredethlyn all day; secondly, because he was going to have a good dinner and some rare old tawny port, which was the boast of Mr. Corbett the magistrate; and thirdly, because he was going to be admired; and in a Tasmanian settlement even the worship of a young lady with bony fingers and drab-coloured eyes and hair is not altogether a despicable tribute.

"When I hear 'Kinloch of Kinloch' tortured out of all semblance of himself upon that wretched piano, I let myself go somehow or other," thought the ensign, "and I fancy myself standing behind Maude Hillary's Broadwood in the long drawing-room at Twickenham. Twickenham! Shall I ever see Twickenham again, and Maude Hillary, and the twinkling light upon the river, and the low branches of the chestnuts, the sedgy banks, the lazy boats, the lights up at the 'Star and Garter' glimmering across the dusky valley? Shall I ever see that fair civilised land again? or shall I die in this condemned and accursed hole?—die, forgotten and unlamented, before I have made any mark in the world?"

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## CHAPTER II.

### THE MAN.

WHILE Mr. Lowther went to eat his dinner with the hospitable magistrate, Francis Tredethlyn did his work briskly; folding his master's coats and waistcoats, brushing boots, clearing away little heaps of cigar-ash, and picking up torn scraps of paper and open books cast recklessly upon the floor by a reader who was too badly disposed towards a world that had ill-treated him to find the opinions of any author entirely to his taste.

The soldier whistled that lively melody in praise of Erin's daughters all the time, and achieved his task with the rapid neatness of a male Cinderella specially endowed by some fairy godmother; and when Mr. Lowther's humble sitting-room and bed-room were restored to perfect order, his valet retired to his own little apartment, which was a shed-like chamber at the back of the cottage, and a kind of compromise between a dressing-room and a wash-house. Here Mr. Tredethlyn made his toilet, which consisted of a rapid plunge of his head and throat into a tub of cold water, some brisk operations with a cake of yellow soap, accompanied by sputtering and whizzing noises of an alarming character, a little fierce rubbing down with a coarse

towel, and the smart application of a stiff and implacable-looking hair-brush. When this was done, Francis Tredethlyn put on his jacket, and went out into the garden to smoke his pipe and converse with the convicts.

Now that the gifts of nature had been enhanced by the adornments of art, the ensign's valet was by no means a bad-looking fellow. He was tall, broad-shouldered, and muscular in build as a modern Hercules. His closely cut black hair revealed the outline of a well-shaped head well placed upon his shoulders. Under his dark, almost gipsy-brown, skin was a rich crimson glow, which deepened or faded under the influence of any powerful emotion. His nose was straight, but rather short, and of no particular type; but a sculptor would have told you there was a special beauty about the curve of his full open nostrils, and Honoré de Balzac would have informed you that a man with that kind of nostril is generally good for something in this world. His forehead was low, stronger in the perceptive than in the reflective organs; his eyes were of a clear grey, darkened by the shadow of thick black lashes. He was a handsome soldier; he would have made a handsome gladiator in the old Roman days; a noble-looking brigand, in the days when brigands were chivalrous; a dashing highwayman, in the age when Claude Duval rode gaily to his death on Tyburn tree; a glorious sporting farmer down in Leicestershire to-day; but no power upon this earth could have transformed him into an elegant West-end lounger, an accomplished dawdler in fashionable drawing-rooms, or a "gentleman" in the modern acceptation of the word.

He went out into the garden now, to smoke his pipe of bird's-eye and talk to the convict gardeners, who brightened at his approach, and deliberately planted themselves in a convenient position upon their spades, in order to converse with him. I am sorry to say that he was as much at home in their society as if they had been the most estimable of mankind, and that he encouraged them to talk freely of their burglarious experiences in the Old World. Was there not a smack of brigandage and adventure in these experiences, and even a dash of chivalry, according to the two men's own showing? for they told stories of encounters in which they shone out quite with heroic lustre from their rooted objection to cut an elderly lady's throat, and their gallant bearing towards a high-minded young damsel who had led them from room to room in her father's mansion, and had pointed with her own fair hands to the whereabouts of the family valuables. Francis Tredethlyn sat upon the trunk of a fallen acacia, watching the lazy clouds in the still evening sky, and smoking his pipe, long after the two convicts had struck work and retired to their own quarters. He sat smoking and musing; thinking, as I suppose a man so banished must think,

of that other far-away world which he had left behind him; and which it seemed to him sometimes, in such still moments as these, that he should never see again.

"So far away, so very far away!" he mused. "I wonder how the little village street upon the hill is looking now? It's winter time now there, or getting towards winter time anyhow. I can fancy it of an evening, with the lights twinkling in the low shop windows, the big castle-gate frowning down upon the poor little street; the churchyard, where Susy and I have played, all dark and lonesome in the winter night; and Susy herself—pretty little dark-eyed Susy—sitting by the hearth in the big kitchen at Tredethlyn, stitch, stitch, stitch, while the old man nods and snores over his newspaper. Poor little Susy, what a hard life it is for her; and the old man as rich as that king of somewhere—Croesus, don't they call him?—if his neighbours are to be believed. Poor little Susy! is she fond of me, I wonder? and will she be pleased to marry me, if ever I'm able to go back, and say, 'Susy, the best I could do, after running away and 'listing, was to save up money to buy my discharge, so that I might come home again to claim the old promise—for better for worse, for richer or poorer'? We couldn't well be poorer than we should be just at first; for, of course, the old chap would turn rusty, and cut Susy off with a shilling; but who cares for that?" thought Francis Tredethlyn, snapping his fingers in the independence of his spirit. "If Susy loves me, and I love Susy, and we're both young and strong and industrious, what's to prevent us getting on in the world, without anybody's money to help us?"

The soldier smoked another pipe in a dreamy reverie, in which his thoughts still hovered about one familiar spot in his native country—a long, low, stone-built farmhouse, standing alone upon a broad plateau of bare moorland, very dreary of aspect in winter,—a dismal, ghastly-looking homestead, in which the ornamental had been sacrificed to the useful,—a gaunt, naked-looking dwelling-place, upon whose decoration or improvement a ten-pound note had not been expended within the memory of man,—a house which had gone down through three generations of close-fisted, cross-grained owners, and which had grown uglier and drearier under the rule of each generation.

This was the habitation which stood as clearly out against the vague background of Francis Tredethlyn's dreams as if it had been palpably present upon the rising ground on the other side of the bay. This was the house; and in the low narrow doorway, fronting the desolate expanse of stunted brown grass, the soldier saw the slender figure of a girl—a girl with dark, gentle eyes, and a quaker-like dress of coarse brown stuff,—a girl who stood with her hand shading her eyes, looking at the distant

figure of an old man plodding homeward in the winter twilight. He had so often seen her thus, that it was only natural the picture of her should present itself to his mind to-night, as his thoughts wandered homeward. He was so far away from this girl and the familiar place in which she lived, that it seemed almost impossible to him that he could ever see her again, or tread the well-known pathways along which he had so often walked by her side. He thought of her almost as the dead may think of the living—if they do think of us.

“ Poor little Susy ! I wonder whether she loved me—whether she loves me still ? I wasn’t like some of your lovers,—I wasn’t one of your desperate fellows. I had no hot fits, or cold fits, or jealous fits, or such like, and there are some folks that might say I was never in love at all. But I was very fond of Susy—poor little tender-hearted Susy ! I used to think of her, somehow, as if she had been my little sister. I think of her like that now.”

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### CHAPTER III.

#### TIDINGS OF HOME.

It was late when Mr. Lowther came home from his friend the magistrate’s. The faint flush that lighted up his face, and the unwonted lustre of his eyes, bore testimony to the merits of Mr. Corbett’s tawny port. All Sandemann’s choicest vintages would not have tempted Harcourt Lowther to sit listening to a prosy old magistrate’s civil-service experiences, in Europe ; but on this side of the world a bottle of good wine and a tolerably civilised companion were not entirely to be despised. The ensign was in a very good temper when he came into the little parlour, where a swinging lamp burned brightly, and where a tobacco-jar, a meerschaum, a case-bottle of Schiedam, a tumbler, and a jug of water, were set upon the table ready for the master of the domain. Mr. Lowther was in excellent temper, and inclined to be especially civil to his valet.

“ No Schiedam to-night, Tredethlyn,” he said, throwing himself into the wicker easy-chair, and stretching his feet upon a smaller chair that stood opposite to him ; “ I’ve had a little too much of that old fellow’s port. Devilish good stuff it is too, if it hadn’t a tendency to spoil a man’s complexion, and concentrate itself in his nose. I’ll take a pipe, though. Just give me a light, will you, Tredethlyn ? ”

He sat in a lazy attitude, with his head thrown back against the rail of the chair, and daintily arranged the stray shreds of tobacco in the bowl of his pipe with the delicate tip of his little finger ; while the private lighted a long strip of folded paper and handed it to his master.

"Oh, by the bye," muttered Mr. Lowther, speaking with his mouth shut upon the amber mouthpiece of his pipe, "I've got some news for you, Tredethlyn. Just put your hand in my coat-pocket, and take out the paper you'll find there. Goodness knows what it means,—a legacy of fifty pounds or so, I suppose. Anyhow, you're a lucky devil. I should be glad enough to get even such a windfall as that; but I never hear of anything to my advantage."

Francis Tredethlyn had taken the paper from his master's pocket by this time; it was an old copy of the "Times;" and he presented it to the ensign, but the other pushed it away impatiently.

"I don't want it," he said; "I think I read every line of it while old Corbett was snoring after dinner. Look at the third advertisement in the second column of the Supplement."

The soldier did as he was directed, and read the advertisement aloud very slowly and in a tone of unmitigated wonder.

"Francis Tredethlyn, nephew of the late Oliver Tredethlyn, of Tredethlyn Grange, near Landresdale, Cornwall. If the above-mentioned will apply to Messrs. Krusdale and Scardon, solicitors, 29, Verulam Buildings, Gray's Inn, he will hear of something to his advantage."

"The late Oliver Tredethlyn!" cried Francis, staring blankly at the paper; "my uncle's dead, then!"

"Was he alive when you left England?" asked the ensign.

"He was alive when I left Cornwall. Dead! my uncle Oliver?" the young man said, in a dreamy voice; "and I pictured him to-night in my fancy, plodding home from the outlying lands, as hale and stern and sturdy as ever. Dead! and he may have been dead ever so long, for all this tells me," added Francis Tredethlyn, pointing to the advertisement.

"You were uncommonly fond of your uncle, I suppose, from the way you talk of him," Mr. Lowther remarked, carelessly. He was in good humour to-night, and ready to talk about anything,—inclined to take almost an interest in the affairs of another man, and that man his valet!

"Fond of him!" exclaimed Francis Tredethlyn, "fond of my uncle Oliver! I don't think the creature ever lived that was fond of him, or whose love he'd have cared to have. He liked folks to obey him, and cut things as close as he wanted 'em cut; but beyond that, he didn't care what they thought or what they did. I suppose he did love his daughter though, after a fashion, but it was a very hard fashion. No, sir, I wasn't particularly fond of my uncle Oliver Tredethlyn, but I'm struck all of a heap by the news of his death coming upon me so sudden; and I'm thinking of the effect that it will have on my cousin Susy,—she's all alone in the world now.—poor little Susy!"

The ensign looked up quickly. "Susy!" he said, "who the deuce is your cousin Susy?"

"She's my uncle Oliver's only daughter, sir; his only child! too, for the matter of that. We were engaged to be married, sir; but things went wrong with me at home, and I ran away and enlisted."

"Ah! How long ago did all that happen?"

"Nearly five years, sir."

"And you've kept up some sort of a correspondence with your cousin since then, I suppose?"

"Not I, sir; her father wasn't the man to let her write a letter that would cost a lump of money for postage, or to write any letter to such a scamp as me, either; and poor Susy was too close watched, and too obedient into the bargain, to write without his leave. I've written to her now and then, but I've had no news from home since the day I left it, except this that you've brought me to-night."

"And I suppose your uncle has left you a legacy?"

"I suppose so, sir; it isn't likely to be much anyhow, for I never was any great favourite of his."

"You'd better write to these lawyers, though. There's a mail to-morrow; bring out your desk, and write at once."

"Here, sir?"

"Yes, here."

Francis Tredethlyn hesitated for a moment, but seeing that his master was resolute, he brought a clumsy old-fashioned mahogany desk from his chamber at the back of the cottage, and seated himself at a corner of the table with the desk before him. He had placed himself at a very respectful distance from Mr. Harcourt Lowther; but that gentleman, having finished his pipe, got up, and began to walk slowly up and down the room, while his valet squared his elbows and commenced a laborious inscription of his address at the top of the page.

"Tell them that you are Francis Tredethlyn, nephew of Oliver Tredethlyn, and that you can bring forward plenty of witnesses to prove your identity, and so on, as soon as you can get back to England. I don't suppose they'll let you have your legacy till they see you. Ask them to tell you what the amount is, at any rate."

Mr. Lowther did not confine himself to giving his valet these hints upon the composition of his letter; he was good enough to stand behind the young man's chair, and look over his shoulder as he wrote; but as Francis Tredethlyn's penmanship was not of a very rapid order, the ensign's eyes soon wandered from the page, and straying to an open division of the desk, lighted on something that looked like a water-coloured sketch, covered with silver paper.

"Why, you sly dog," he cried with a laugh, "you've got a woman's picture in your desk!"

Francis Tredethlyn blushed and looked very sheepish as he took the little water-coloured sketch out of its silver-paper envelope and handed it submissively to his master.

"It's my cousin Susan's portrait, sir," he said; "it was taken by a travelling artist, who came down our way one summer. It isn't much of a likeness, but it pleases me to look at it sometimes, for I can fill up all that's wanting in the face out of my own mind, and see my cousin smiling at me, as if I was at home again."

Mr. Lowther stood behind his servant's chair looking at the portrait, while the soldier went on writing. It was not the work of a very brilliant artist; there was none of those deliciously careless touches, none of that transparent lightness, which a clever painter's manipulation would have displayed. It was a stiff, laborious little portrait of a girl with hazel brown eyes and smooth banded brown hair, and an innocent childish mouth, rosy and fresh and smiling as a summer's morning in the country. It was only the picture of a country girl, who seemed to have looked shyly at the artist as he painted her.

"So that's your cousin Susy," said Mr. Lowther, laying the picture down upon the table by Tredethlyn's elbow. "I shan't stop while you address your letter, and I don't want any thing more, so you can go to bed at once if you like. Good night."

The ensign took a candle from a little side-table as he spoke, lighted it at the lamp above Tredethlyn's head, and went out of the room. Francis finished his letter, and placed it on the mantelpiece, where some letters of his master's were lying ready for the next day's mail. He did not go to bed at once, though it was late, and he was free to do so, but sat for some time with his cousin Susan Tredethlyn's portrait in his hand, looking at the girlish face, and thinking of the changes that had come to pass in his old home.

"The old chap was hard and stern with her, and her life was a dull one, poor little girl," thought the soldier; "and she'll have a fine fortune, I suppose, now he's gone; but somehow I don't like to think of her left lonely in the world; she's too young and too pretty, and too innocent for that. Innocent! why, bless her poor tender little heart, I don't think she knows there's such a thing as wickedness upon this earth."

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## CHAPTER IV.

### TREDETHLYN'S LUCK.

FRANCIS TREDETHLYN had to wait a very long time before there could be any possibility of a letter from the Gray's Inn solicitors,

but he endured the delay with perfect tranquillity of mind; and if either of the two men seemed anxious for the arrival of the letter, that man was Harcourt Lowther, and not Francis Tredehlyn. The ensign had a trick of alluding to his servant's good fortune whenever things went especially ill with himself.

"Here am I without a friend in the world to lend me a five-pound note," he would remark, impatiently, "and there are you with a chance of a nice little legacy from that old uncle of yours. I shouldn't wonder if you stand in for four or five hundred at he least."

"I don't think it, sir," the valet always answered, coolly. I've heard our neighbours say, that what with farming, what with mining, and dabbling a good bit with funds and railway shares, and such-like, my uncle must be as rich as a Jew; but for all that, I don't look to be much better off for any thing that he ~~has~~ have left me. I suppose he's left every thing to my cousin Susan, seeing that he had neither kith nor kin except her and me. But somehow or other I can't imagine his parting with his money to any one, even after his death. I almost fancy that he'd rather have tied it up, if he could, so that the interest upon it would go on accumulating for ever and ever, thinking as he might perhaps, being old and eccentric, that he'd have a kind of satisfaction, even in his grave, from knowing that the money was going on getting more and more, instead of being spent or squandered."

Francis Tredehlyn did not make this remark in any spirit of ill-nature; he spoke like a man who states a plain fact.

"I dare say he was a regular old curmudgeon," Mr. Lowther answered, "but he must leave his money to some one, and the fact of these lawyers advertising for you is ample proof that he must have left some of it to you."

Such a conversation as this occurred pretty frequently during the long interval in which Francis Tredehlyn waited for the answer to his letter. Sometimes, when Harcourt Lowther was in a very bad temper, he would accuse his attendant of having grown proud and insolent and lazy, since the advent of that *Times* newspaper, which the ensign had borrowed from Mr. Corbett; but every one of the accusations was as groundless as many other of the officer's complaints against people and things in general. There was no change in Francis Tredehlyn: he did his work cheerfully and well, obeyed orders in a frank, manly spirit, and behaved himself altogether in a most exemplary manner.

The time when a letter from England might be expected came round at last; but Francis Tredehlyn evinced no anxiety for the arrival of the solicitors' epistle. A long season of drought had given way before a sudden downfall of rain, and Harcourt

Lowther, who had planned a couple of days' kangaroo hunting, and had made all necessary arrangements for the performance of his duties by a good-natured and efficient colour-sergeant, found himself a prisoner in his cottage at Port Arthur, with nothing to do but wait for a change in the weather.

It was very tiresome. The accomplished, light-hearted Harcourt Lowther, who could take life so pleasantly in the drawing-rooms of Tyburnia or Belgravia, to whom a summer afternoon amongst a group of fashionable gossips in the smoking-room of his favourite club was only too short, found this terrible Tasmanian day intolerably long. He had tried every available way of getting rid of his time. He had sketched a little, and read a little, and played the flute a little, and smoked a great deal, and had relieved the oppression of his spirits by an incalculable number of yawns, and a little occasional bad language. And now, having exhausted all these resources, he stood with his head leaning listlessly against the roughly finished sash of the window, watching the convict labourers at work under the heavy rain. He derived some faint ray of comfort from the signs of these two men. At any rate, there were some people in the world worse off than himself,—unlucky wretches who were obliged to work in wet weather, and wear a hideous dress, and eat coarse unpalatable food, or food that appeared abominably coarse and unpalatable in the eyes of Mr. Harcourt Lowther, who had been known upon occasion to turn up his nose at the culinary masterpieces of Soyer and Francatelli.

"Why don't they kill themselves?" muttered the ensign; "they could drive rusty nails into their veins, and make an end of themselves somehow. There are plenty of poisonous things in my garden that they might eat, and make a finish of their lives that way; but they don't. They go on day after day drudging and toiling, and enduring their lives somehow or other. I suppose they hope to get away some day. How ever should *I* bear my life if I didn't hope to get away—if I didn't hope it would come to an end pretty soon?"

Mr. Lowther, having exhausted the pleasure to be derived from a contemplation of the convicts, took to pacing up and down the two rooms; in the inner of which Francis Tredethlyn was busy cleaning his master's guns.

Walking backwards and forwards, and backwards and forwards, and passing the valet every time, Harcourt Lowther was fain to talk to him; rather for the pleasure and relief of hearing his own voice, than from any desire to be friendly towards his vassal.

"No letter yet, Tredethlyn?" he said.

"No, sir; but it may come any day."

"And you wait for it as quietly as if a legacy, more or less,

was nothing to you. I suppose if they send you a remittance, you'll be wanting to buy your discharge, and leave this place; and I shall have to get another servant,—some awkward, ignorant boor, perhaps?"

"I don't know about that, sir. There's plenty as good as me, I dare say, among our fellows. Other folks may have been brought up respectably, and taken to soldiering, like me. And as for buying my discharge, I don't say but I should be glad to do that, if those lawyer people gave me the chance. I should be glad to get back to England and see my little cousin Susy. I always call her little Susy, because I can't help thinking of her as she was when I remember her first, when she and I were boy and girl sweethearts together. I've thought of her a deal since I got the news of her father's death, and I feel anxious about her, somehow or other, when I fancy her left alone among strangers."

Harcourt Lowther, always walking backwards and forwards between the two rooms, was in the sitting-room when his servant said this. He stopped to look out of the window again, and there seemed to be a kind of dismal fascination for him in the convicts, towards whom his eyes wandered in a moody, absent-minded stare.

"And where do you expect to find her—your cousin, I mean—when you do go back to England?" he asked presently.

"At the old farm, sir, to be sure. Where should I find her but there? Poor little soul! she's never known any other home but that, and isn't likely to leave it in a hurry of her own free will."

"Humph!" muttered the officer, "there's no calculating upon the changes that take place in this world. I never expect to find any thing as I left it when I return to a place or people that I've been absent from for any length of time. I expect to find plenty of changes when I get back to the civilised world again. Do you suppose the people *there* can afford to waste their time thinking of wretched exiles *here*? Life with them is utterly different from what it is with us. When I left England, I was engaged to a beautiful girl with fifty thousand pounds or so for her fortune,—a girl who would have married me, and given me a grand start in life, if it hadn't been for her father; but do you think I expect to find her in the same mind when I go back? Do you think two years' absence won't act as a sponge, and wipe my image out of her thoughts? What has a beautiful, frivolous creature like that to do with constancy? Every man who looks at her falls over head and ears in love with her. She is fed upon flattery and adulation. Is it probable, or natural, or even possible that she will remember *me*?"

It was not likely that Mr. Lowther would ask this question of

his valet. He asked it of himself, rather, in a peevish and complaining spirit, and seemed to find a dismal comfort in harping on his wrongs and his miseries.

"I was a fool to think that Maude Hillary could be constant to me!" he muttered, angrily. In his anger against a world that had treated him so badly, he was angry with himself for having been so much a fool as to expect better treatment. He walked to a little looking-glass hanging over the mantelpiece, and looked at his handsome face. Was it the face of a man who was to have no place in the world? Were his many graces of person, his charm of manner, his versatility of mind, to serve for nothing after all?

"When I think of the fellows who get on in the world, I feel inclined to make an end of all this by cutting my throat," he said, as he frowned at the image in the glass.

He felt the region of the jugular vein softly with the ends of his fingers as he spoke, and wondered whether death by the severance of that important artery was a very painful finish for a man to make. He thought of how he might look if Francis Tredethlyn, finding him late to rise one morning, broke into his room and saw him lying in the sunny little chamber deluged with blood and stone dead. He had been very religiously brought up, amongst gentle, true-hearted women; but there was no more pious compunction in his mind as he thought of suicide than there might have been in the mind of an aboriginal inhabitant of the Solomon Islands. He had a mother at home —a mother who believed in him and idolized him, to the disapprovement of all other creatures; but no image of her grief and despair arose between him and the scheme of a desperate death. His thoughts travelled in a narrow circle, of which self was the unchanging centre.

"I have heard of men making away with themselves on the very eve of some event which would have made a complete change in their fortunes," he thought presently. "I never read the story of a suicide that did not seem more or less the story of a fool. No, my death shall never make a paragraph for a newspaper. I must be very hard pushed when I come to that. This place gives me the blue-devils, and everything looks black to me out here. I wish Abel Janz Tasman and Captain Cook had perished before ever they sighted this dismal land. I wish all the lot of petty Dutch traders and navigators had come to an untimely end before ever they discovered any one of these miserable islands, which have been a paradise for convicts and scoundrels, and a hell for gentlemen, during the last half-century. How was I to know, when I bought a commission in her Majesty's service, that the first stage on the road to martial glory was to be the post of head-gaoler at a settlement in the

**Antipodes?** The papers talk of a change in the transportation system, a change that will rid Van Diemen's Land of its present delightful inhabitants; but no change is likely to come about in my time. I shall have to drag my chain out to the last link, I dare say. It's better to be born lucky than rich, says the proverb; but how about the poor devils who are neither rich nor lucky?"

A rap on the little door, that opened out of the sitting-room on to a patch of garden which lay between the house and the high road, startled Mr. Lowther out of his long reverie.

"It's the fellow with the letters," he cried; and before Francis Tredethlyn could emerge from the inner room, his master had opened the door, and had taken a little packet of letters, newspapers, and magazines from the man who brought them. "One from my mother; one from—yes—from Maude, at last; the *Times*, *Punch*, *Blackwood's*, *United Service*, and the lawyer's letter!—'Francis Tredethlyn, Esq.!' eh? The legacy must be something more than five hundred, my man, or they'd hardly dub you Esquire."

He tossed the letter over to his servant as he spoke, and looked at the Cornishman furtively, with something like envy expressed in his look. Francis Tredethlyn received the lawyers' epistle very coolly, and retired into the adjoining room to read it, while his master sat at the table in the parlour, tearing off the flimsy envelope of a letter with a hasty nervous hand.

"From Maude!" he muttered. "At last, my lady: at last, at last!"

The letter was a very long one, written in a clear and bold yet sufficiently feminine hand, on slippery pink paper scented with a perfume that had survived an Australian voyage. The contents of the letter must have been tolerably pleasing to Harcourt Lowther, for he smiled as he read, and seemed to forget all about Francis Tredethlyn's legacy.

"I miss you very much, though papa surrounds us with gaiety; indeed, I think we have been gayer than ever lately; and he never seems so happy as when our dear old lawn is crowded with visitors. But I miss you, Harcourt, in spite of all the cruel insinuations in your last letter. The summer evenings seem long and dreary when I think of you, so far away, so unhappy, as your letters tell me you are, Harcourt, though you are too unselfish to admit the truth in plain words. I scarcely open the piano once in a month, now that I have no one to play concertante duets. I scarcely care for a new opera; for the men who come into our box bore me to death with their vapid talk, and I know that not one of them understands what he talks about. I am not happy, Harcourt, though you taunt me with my wealth and my position, and the difference between

our lives. I am not happy, for our future seems to grow darker and darker every day. I have mentioned you to my father several times, and every time he seems more angry than the last; so now I feel that your name is tacitly tabooed; and any chance allusion to you from the lips of strangers makes me tremble and turn cold. I have tried in vain to comprehend the reason of my father's aversion to any thought of a marriage between you and me. I have been so much a spoiled child, that to be thwarted or opposed on any subject seems strange to me, most of all when that subject is so near my heart. I can scarcely think that my dear father would allow any consideration of fortune to stand in the way of happiness, and yet that is the only consideration that can influence him, for I know that he always liked and admired you. You must awhile be patient: what I can do I will. And you must trust me, dear Harcourt, and not pain me again as you have pained me by those unkind doubts of my constancy. You know that money has never been any consideration with me; and you ought to know that I would willingly lose every penny of my fortune rather than sacrifice my promise to you."

"O yes; that's all very well!" muttered Mr. Lowther peevishly, after having read this part of Miss Hillary's epistle twice over; "but Lionel Hillary's daughter with fifty thousand pounds or so, and without a penny, are two very different people. Not but what she's always a beautiful girl and a charming girl; but a man can have his pick of charming and beautiful girls, if *that's* all he wants to set him up in life. I love her, Heaven knows; and the sight of her writing sends a thrill through my veins like the touch of her hand, or the fluttering of her breath upon my cheek. But poverty makes a man practical, and I think I never read a letter that had less of the practical in it than this letter. It's a woman's epistle all over. We must be patient, and wait till we're worn out by waiting, and the engagement between us becomes a chain that binds us both from better things, and the sound of each other's name becomes a nuisance to us from its associations of trouble and responsibility. That's what a long engagement generally comes to. If I'd distinguished myself in India, led a desperate charge against orders, or taken the gate of an Affghan fortress, or done something reckless and mad-headed and lucky, and could have gone back with a captaincy, and a dash of newspaper celebrity about my name, I might have hoped that old Hillary, in a moment of maudlin after-dinner generosity, would have given his consent to my marriage with Maude. But how am I to present myself at Twickenham, and say, 'I have been taking care of convicts for the last two years,—not particularly well, for more convicts have escaped into the bush in my time than in

any other man's time, according to the reports,—and I have come back to England with the same rank that I had when I left, and with less money than I took away with me? Can I go to Lionel Hillary and say that? Is that the sort of argument which will induce a man to give me his daughter and her fortune?"

He went back to Miss Hillary's letter. It was only a frivolous letter, after all; and it contained more intelligence about a morning concert in Hanover Square, a regatta at Ryde, and a preternaturally sagacious Skye-terrier, than was likely to be gratifying to a discontented exile at Port Arthur. But Mr. Lowther was fain to content himself as he might with the pretty girlish gossip. It was something, after all his grumbling, to receive the assurance that he was not entirely forgotten by the only daughter and sole heiress of one of the richest merchants in the city of London.

He looked up presently from his letter, to see Francis Tredeithlyn standing in the doorway between the two rooms, pale to the lips, and clutching at his throat as if he had some difficulty in breathing.

"What's the matter, man?" asked the ensign; "hasn't the old chap left you any money, after all?"

"It isn't that, sir," gasped the soldier; "there's money enough and to spare. It's my cousin Susy; that poor little innocent creature, that was as pure as the apple-blossoms on the gnarled old trees in the orchard when I left home. She's done something, sir—something that turned her father against her. She's gone away, sir, and no one knows where she's gone, or what's come of her, or whether she's dead or alive. And her father disinherited her, poor lost lamb; and—that'll tell you all about the fortune, sir, if you want to know about it." Francis Tredeithlyn threw the lawyer's letter upon the table before his master, and walked away to the window—the same window at which the ensign had stood looking out at the convicts half an hour before.

Harcourt Lowther read the lawyer's letter, at first with a listless, indifferent air, and then as eagerly as if he had been reading his own death-warrant. It was a long letter, worded in a very formal manner, but it set forth the fact that the fortune left by Oliver Tredeithlyn to his nephew Francis amounted to something over thirty thousand a year.

For some minutes after this fact had been made clear to him Harcourt Lowther sat with the open letter before him, staring at the lines. Then suddenly the blank stupor upon his face gave way to a look of despair. The ensign flung his head and arms upon the table, and burst into tears.

"I have been eating my own heart in this place for nearly

two years," he sobbed, "and not one ray of light—no, by the heaven above me! not one—has dawned upon my life; and a valet, a private soldier, the fellow who scours my rooms and blacks my boots, has thirty thousand a year left him!"

There was something so terrible in this hysterical outburst of rage and envy, something so utterly piteous in this unmanly revolt against another man's good fortune, that Francis Tredethlyn forgot his own trouble before the aspect of his master's degradation.

"Don't, sir," he cried, "for God's sake, don't do that! All the riches in the world wouldn't pay a man for taking on like that. If you want money, you're welcome to borrow some of mine as soon as ever I get the power to lend it. There's more than I care to have, or could ever spend. You'll be welcome to what you want, Mr. Lowther. I don't set much account upon money, and I don't think I ever shall; and the thoughts of this fortune don't give me half the pleasure I've felt in the gift of a crown-piece long ago, when I was a little lad. I suppose it was because I thought then there was nothing in all the world that five shillings wouldn't buy, and because I'm wiser now, and know there are some things a million of money can't purchase. The news of this money has brought the thoughts of my father and my mother back to me, Mr. Lowther. I'd give every sixpence of it, if it could bring back the past, and pay out the bailiff's man that was sitting by our kitchen-fire at home when my mother lay ill up-stairs. But it can't do that. My father and mother both died poor, and all this money can't buy back one of the sorrowful days they spent in the old farm, when things went from bad to worse, and debt and ruin came down upon us. I don't seem to care for the money, Mr. Lowther; I am dazed and bewildered, somehow, by the greatness of the sum, but I don't seem to care."

The ensign had calmed himself by this time. He got up and brushed the tears from his eyes, real tears of rage, envy, mortification, and despair. There was a faint blush upon his face, the one evidence of his shame which he could not suppress in a moment, but all other evidences of feeling had passed away.

"You're a good fellow, Tredethlyn," he said, "an excellent simple-hearted fellow; as simple-hearted as a baby,—for who but a baby ever talked as you talk about this money? and I congratulate you upon your good luck. I see these lawyer fellows send you a bill for a couple of hundred; that'll buy you off here pleasantly, and get you back to England. My advice to you is to get back as fast as ever you can, and enter into possession of your property. It seems a complicated kind of estate from what I can make out—mining property, and agricultural property, and shares in half the speculations of modern

times,—but it's a great estate, and that's all you want to know. Go back; and as soon as ever I can get away from this accursed hole, I'll look you up in London; and I—I will borrow a little of that money you generously offer, and I'll turn bear leader, and show you what life is in the upper circle, to which thirty thousand a year is the universal 'open sesame.' ”

The ensign slapped his hand upon his servant's shoulder with a jovial air, and spoke almost as gaily as if Oliver Tredethlyn's fortune was to be in some way or other a stroke of good luck for himself.

“ Thank you, sir,” Francis answered, thoughtfully, “ you're very good; but I don't care to force myself in among grand folks because I'm rich enough to do as they do. I've got a task before me, and it may be a long one.”

“ A task!”

“ Yes; I've got to look for my cousin.”

“ Your cousin, Susan Tredethlyn!—the girl whose portrait you showed me?”

“ Yes, sir. All this money would have been hers, most likely, if she hadn't done something to turn my uncle against her. I can't forget that, you see, sir; and the first use I make of the money will be to spend some of it in looking after her.”

“ Susan Tredethlyn,” muttered Harcourt Lowther,—“ Susan Tredethlyn. That portrait you showed me was a very bad one, for I haven't the least notion of what your cousin is like.”

## CHAPTER V.

### COMING HOME.

WHEN the jaded horses of the “ Electric ” coach from Falmouth stopped before the Crown Inn at Landresdale, in the county of Cornwall, on the 13th of July, 1852, the landlord of the little hostelry was somewhat startled by an event which was of very rare occurrence in those parts. A passenger alighted from the back of the coach, and demanded his portmanteau from the guard,—a passenger who, carrying his portmanteau as easily as if it had been a parcel of flimsy milliner's ware, walked straight to the little private parlour opposite the bar, and ensconced himself therein.

“ I shall want my dinner, and a bed, Joseph Penruffin,” he said to the proprietor of the Crown. “ You'd better see the coach off, and then you can come and talk to me.”

Mr. Penruffin retired aghast and staring.

“ I don't know who he is, Sarah,” he remarked to a comely-looking woman, who was sitting amongst a noble array of shelves and bottles in a shady little bar that seemed a good deal

too small for such a portly presence. "His name's as clean gone out of my mind as if I'd never set eyes upon him; but I know him, and he knows me, Sarah, for he called me by my name as glib as you please, and his face—Lord bless us and save us!—his face is as familiar to me as yours."

The passenger who had surprised the Crown Inn from its lazy tranquillity stood at the little window looking out at the coach. The passenger was Francis Tredethlyn, lately a foot-soldier in her Majesty's service, now a gentleman of landed estate and funded property; but very little changed by the change in his fortune. As he had been independent and fearless in the days when he ruled his life by the orders of other men, so was he simple and unpretending now in the hour of his sudden prosperity. What he had said to his master in the cottage at Port Arthur in the first flush of his new fortunes appeared to be equally true of him now. He did not seem to care about his wealth. He was in no way elated by a change of fortune which would have sent some men into a madhouse.

"It seems to me, somehow, as if there was a kind of balance kept up in this world between good and evil, like the debtor and creditor sides of a ledger. I put down my uncle Oliver's fortune on one side, and it looks as if I was the luckiest fellow in Christendom. But there's the loss of poor little Susy must go down on the other side, and then the book looks altogether different. The loss of her—yes, the loss—that's the word! If the earth had opened and swallowed her up, she couldn't seem more lost to me than she is."

The passengers of the "Electric" had recruited themselves by this time, and a fresh pair of horses had replaced the tired animals who now stood steaming in the great stable-yard. The coach rolled slowly off, along a road that lay straight before the windows of the Crown—a road that crept under the steep slope of a thickly wooded hill, defended by an old crumbling wall, which, even in its decay, was grander and stronger than any modern wall that ever girdled a modern gentleman's estate. The dark-red brick wall, and all the sombre woods above it, belonged to the Marquis of Landresdale, upon whose mansion and estate the little town or village of Landresdale was a kind of dependant, the inhabitants being almost all of them supported indirectly or directly by the patronage of the great man and his household. By these simple people the Cornish nobleman was spoken of with awe and reverence as the "Marquis;" and that the world held any other creature with a claim to that title was a fact utterly ignored—it may be, even discredited—by the ratepayers of Landresdale. Under the shadow of Landresdale House they were born and lived; and in a church which was only a kind of mausoleum for the departed nobles and dames of

the house of Landresdale they worshipped every sabbath-day, until in the minds of some hero-worshippers, the figure of the Marquis grew into a giant shape that blotted out all the world beyond Landresdale.

"How familiar the old place seems to me, and yet how strange!" thought Francis Tredethlyn, as he stood at the window. "There's Jim Teascott the cobbler over the way, sitting in the very same attitude he was in when I stopped at the corner below to take my last look at Landresdale. But the street seems as if it had dwindled and shrunk away into half the size it used to be; and I feel as strange—as strange as if I'd been dead and buried, and had come to life again after folks had forgotten all about me; even the very seasons are all wrong, somehow, to my mind, as they might seem to a man that had been lying dead ever so long."

Francis Tredethlyn rubbed his broad palm across his forehead, as if to clear some kind of cloud away from his intellect. It was scarcely strange that he should be confused and mystified by the seasons. He had left autumnal clouds and winds in the Antipodes; and after a hundred days or so at sea, he found a blazing July sky above his native land, and he felt as if he had, somehow or other, been cheated out of a winter. He looked at a little pocket-book, in which he had written some names and addresses and other memoranda, and in which the initials "S. T." occurred very often. Those initials meant Susan Tredethlyn, and the memoranda in the pocket-book chiefly related to inquiries which Francis had made about his lost cousin.

Those inquiries had resulted in very little information. The lawyers had only been able to tell Francis the bare facts relating to his uncle's death; how one day, when they least expected to see the old man, he had suddenly presented himself at their offices, very pale, very feeble, and with an awful something, which even they recognized as the sign-manual of the King of Terrors himself, imprinted on his haggard features: how he had seated himself quietly in his accustomed place, and had dictated to them, deliberately and unflinchingly, the terms of a will, by which he bequeathed every shilling he possessed to his nephew, Francis Tredethlyn; how, when they, as in duty bound, remonstrated with him about the injustice that such a will would inflict upon his only daughter, a hideous frown had distorted his face, and he had struck his clenched fist upon the office-table, crying, with the most horrible imprecation ever uttered in that place, that no penny of his getting should ever go to save his daughter from rotting in a workhouse or starving to death on the king's highway;—he had said this, and in such a manner as most effectually to put an end to all remonstrance on the part of his solicitors. This was all that the lawyers could

tell Francis Tredethlyn about his cousin Susan; but they had gone on to tell him how his uncle had insisted on leaving the office alone and on foot; how he had walked the best part of the way from Gray's Inn to an old-fashioned commercial inn in the Borough, and how he had broken down at last, only a hundred yards from his destination, and had fainted away on the threshold of a chemist's shop, whence he had been carried to his death-bed. This had happened on the 30th of June in the preceding year; and this was all that the lawyers had to tell Francis Tredethlyn, over and above such intelligence as related only to the extent and nature of the property bequeathed to him by his late uncle.

But in Landresdale the name of Oliver Tredethlyn was almost as well known as that of the Marquis himself; and in Landresdale Francis hoped to learn the true story of his cousin's fate. He stood now looking out of the window into the rustic highway, as quiet in the summer evening calm as if it had been a street in one of the buried cities of Italy, as peaceful in its drowsy aspect as if no palpitating human heart had ever carried its daily burden of care and sorrow along the narrow footways, beneath the shadow of the peaked roofs and quaint abutting upper stories. He stood looking out, and remembering himself a boy in that old hill-side street; he stood there now, wondering alike at the past and the present, which by contrast seemed both equally strange and unnatural; he stood there in all the flush and vigour of his youth, a tall, broad-shouldered, simple-hearted soldier, with a fortune far exceeding the narrow limits of his arithmetical powers, as ignorant of all the real world that lay before him as a little country lad who rides to town upon the top of a load of hay and expects to find the streets paved with gold, and the Queen dressed in her crown and robes, and sitting on her throne with the ball and sceptre in her hands for ever and ever.

The landlord of the Crown came bustling in presently with a wooden tray of knives and forks, and glasses and cruets, that would have amply served for a dinner-party of half-a-dozen. He laid the cloth with great ceremony, although with a certain air of briskness inseparable from innkeeping, even in the laziest and dullest village in all England; and he kept a furtive watch upon his guest throughout all his operations, from the preparatory polishing down of the mahogany table, to the final flourish with which he removed a very large cover from a very small rumpsteak.

"I think I ought to know you, sir," he said, courteously, as Francis Tredethlyn seated himself at the table.

"I think you ought, Joseph Penruffin; I think you ought to remember Francis Tredethlyn, son of your old friend John

Tredethlyn, of Pen Gorbald, who was a little bit too friendly in this house, perhaps, for his own prosperity."

"Francis Tredethlyn!" cried the landlord, clapping his hand upon his knee, "Francis Tredethlyn! To be sure it is! To think that I should forget a face that was once as familiar to me as my own son's! Francis Tredethlyn! Why, I remember you a lad playing cricket on the green yonder with my own boys. And you've come into a very fine fortune, sir, I understand; and I hope you will excuse the liberty, if I make so bold as to wish you every happiness with it, Francis Tredethlyn. Lord bless us and save us! why, I can remember you a little bit of a toddling child coming into Landresdale Church with your mother on a summer Sunday morning, as if it was yesterday! I ask pardon for being so bold and free-like, but the sight of your face takes me back to old times, and I'm apt to forget myself."

Mr. Penruffin's mind was curiously divided between the memories of the past and his desire to be duly reverential to Francis Tredethlyn's new fortunes. The young man smiled as he recognized the influence of his newly acquired wealth at war with the associations of his boyhood. He had seen pretty much the same thing in the office of Messrs. Krusdale and Scardon. He was beginning already to perceive that an income of thirty thousand a year made a kind of barrier between himself and poorer men, and that they regarded him with the same feeling of mingled reverence and familiarity with which they would have looked at a very ordinary statue seen across a wonderful screen of virgin gold.

"And the sight of *your* face takes *me* back to old times, Mr. Penruffin," he said, with rather a mournful accent, "and I'd freely give half this great fortune of mine if I could bring back one of those summer Sunday mornings in the old church, and see myself a little fellow again, trudging by my mother's side, with a green-baize bag of prayer-books on my arm. I'd give five thousand pounds for a silk-dress I saw in a Plymouth draper's fifteen years ago, when I was too poor to do any thing but wish for it, if my mother were alive to wear it. I used to think, when I was a lad, of what I'd buy for my mother out of the first five-pound note I ever earned; and now I've got thirty thousand a year, and there's nothing upon all this earth that I can buy for her, except a gravestone to mark the spot where she lies."

"Thirty thousand a year!" muttered the landlord, in an undertone, which had just a tinge of disappointment in it. The Landresdale people had given their imaginations free play since the death of Oliver Tredethlyn, and the old man's fortune had swelled into almost fabulous proportions with the lapse of time; so thirty thousand didn't seem so very much, after all. There

had been an idea in Landresdale that Francis Tredethlyn would most likely buy up the Marquis's estate off-hand, and if practicable make a handsome offer for the purchase of the title.

"I am sure, sir, your feelings do you credit," said Mr. Penruffin, after that brief sense of disappointment; "I may say very great credit," he added, with emphasis,—as if any display of feeling from the possessor of thirty thousand a year were specially meritorious. "I suppose you have come down this way to survey your property, sir; to look about you a little, eh?" inquired the landlord of the Crown, when Francis had finished his frugal dinner.

"Not I," the young man answered; "I scarcely know what my property is yet, though the lawyers told me a long rigmarole about it. No, I've come on a very different errand," he added gravely. "You remember my cousin, Susan Tredethlyn, I dare say? I have come to look for her."

Joseph Penruffin shook his head solemnly, and breathed a long sigh that was almost a groan.

"If that's your errand here, sir, I'm afraid it isn't likely to be a very fortunate one. Folks in Landresdale never expect to see Susan Tredethlyn again; she went away from the farm four years ago; no one knows exactly where she went; no one knows why she went. There's your uncle's old servants, Mr. Tredethlyn, of course they *might* have said something, if they'd liked to it. But you may as well go and question the tombstones in Landresdale churchyard as question *them*. All I know, or all anybody knows in this place is, that your cousin Susan went away and never came back again; and it stands to reason that she must have done something very bad indeed, and made her father very desperate against her, before the old man would have gone and left all his money away from her—meaning no disrespect to you, sir, but only looking at it in the light of human nature in general," added the landlord, apologetically.

"I'll never believe that Susan Tredethlyn did any thing wicked or unwomanly till her own lips tell me so," cried Francis, bringing his hand heavily down on the table. "She may have made my uncle desperate against her, *that's* likely enough, for he was always hard with her; and when I think of his having hoarded all this money, and remember the life my cousin Susan used to lead, I can scarcely bring myself to believe that she was his own flesh and blood. I'll never believe that she did any thing wrong. I'll never believe that she could grow to be any thing different from what she was when I left home,—an innocent, modest little creature, who was almost frightened of her own pretty looks when she caught a sight of herself in a glass. But I'm going up to the old house; and if Martha Dryscoll or her husband know any thing of my lost cousin, I'll get the

knowledge from them, though I have to wring it out of their wizened old throats."

The young man rose as he said this, and took his hat and stick from a chair near the window. Joseph Penruffin watched him with something like alarm upon his countenance.

"You'll sleep here to-night, sir?" he asked.

"Yes; I'm going straight up to the Grange, and I don't know how long I may be gone; but I'll come back here to sleep. I should scarcely fancy lying down in one of those dreary old rooms; I should expect to see the wandering spirit of my lost cousin come and look in at me from the darkness outside my window. No; however late I may be, I'll come back here to sleep."

"And perhaps you'd like some little trifle for supper, sir, having made such an uncommon poor dinner," suggested the landlord,—"a chicken and a little bit of grass, or a tender young duck and a dish of peas?"

But Francis Tredethlyn was walking up the little village street out of earshot of these savoury suggestions before the landlord had finished his sentence.

"I don't call that manners," muttered Mr. Penruffin; "but I shall cook the chicken for ten o'clock, and chance it; he can afford to pay for it, whether he eats it or not. And I think, taking into consideration old acquaintance and thirty thousand a year, it would only have been friendly in Francis Tredethlyn if he'd ordered a bottle of wine with his dinner."

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE END OF THE WORLD.

THE sun was low when Francis Tredethlyn left the Crown Inn, and walked slowly up the village street. The sun was low, and already a crimson glory flickered here and there upon the quaint old casements. The young man walked slowly, looking about him with a half-doubtful, half-bewildered gaze, like a man who sees his native village in a dream. And indeed no village in the vision of a sleeper could be more tranquil in its rustic repose than this Cornish street, steep and stony, mounting to the summit of a hill, upon whose top the great gates of Landresdale loomed grim and stately, like the entrance to an ogre's castle in fairyland. You climbed the steep little street; and you came to the big gates of Landresdale; and that was all. The village ended here; and there was nothing for you to do but to go back again. It was like coming to the end of the world, and finding a great Elizabethan door of ponderous oak and iron barred against any chaotic realm that might lie beyond our every-day

earth. There may have been occasions—indeed, the inhabitants of Landresdale would have testified to many such—on which those ponderous doors swung open on their mighty hinges: but the ignorant traveller, looking at them shut, found it difficult to realize the possibility of their ever being opened. They looked like the doors of a mausoleum: which may open once in half a century to admit the coffined dead, but can never be unclosed for any meaner purpose. Grim towers flanked the stony arch on either side, and two old rusty cannon displayed their iron noses within the shadow of the towers, ready to fire a volley down the hilly street whenever the simple folks of Landresdale should evince any revolutionary tendencies.

To the right of the great gates there was a handsome wing of solid masonry, whose Tudor windows opened upon a square courtyard, where there were more cannon, and upon a prim, old-fashioned garden, shut in by a high wall, and only visible to the wanderer through the iron rails and arabesques of a lofty gate, amidst whose scrollwork the arms of the Landresdales and Treverbyns, the Courtenays and Polwheles, were interlaced and entangled.

The garden wall bounded the estate of Rashleigh Vyvyan Trevannence, Marquis of Landresdale; and beneath the shelter of that old ivy-covered red brick wall lay the churchyard, quiet and shadowy, dark with the dense foliage of great yew-trees, thick with long tangled grass, that grew high amongst the slanting headstones. Francis Tredethlyn stopped by the low wooden gate, and leaning against the moss-grown pillar that supported it, looked up at the square towers which seemed like stony sentinels for ever keeping guard over the entrance to Landresdale. The light was red upon the corner window that faced the western sky, but all the other casements stared blankly and darkly out upon the graves in the churchyard, and the empty village street, in which one woman, toiling slowly upwards with a pitcher of water that slopped and trickled at intervals upon the pavement, was the only living presence.

"The great gates look just the same as they used to look," thought Francis Tredethlyn. "When I was a boy, and read fairy-tales, I always fancied that the enchanted castle the wandering prince came to in the middle of a wood, or on the summit of a great mountain, was like Landresdale, a castle standing all alone in the middle of the way, with no road to the right nor to the left, so that the prince *must* go in and ask shelter, though he knew that harm would come of it, or else go back and lose all the trouble of his journey. How I used to long to pull that bell when I was a lad!" thought Francis, looking at the iron ring which swung from a massive chain on one side of the archway.

"But I've no need to dawdle here," he thought, as he pushed the gate open and went into the churchyard. "It seems as if the nearer I get to the place where I am certain to hear the truth about Susan, the more I dread hearing it."

The ignorant traveller who might turn away from the great gates of Landresdale to descend the hill under the impression that the county of Cornwall came to an abrupt termination upon the threshold of the Marquis's domain, would have been mistaken. There were other and higher lands, broad stretches of hill and moorland, lying beyond the churchyard, to the right of the quaint old garden and the Gothic towers and casements: and it was thitherward that Francis Tredethlyn directed his steps. He crossed the churchyard, only pausing briefly before one tombstone, upon which the names of Sarah and John Tredethlyn were cut, low down on the stone, at the bottom of a long list of Tredethlyns, who lay buried in that churchyard. The young man let himself out of the solemn precinct by a little rusty iron gate that opened on a broad expanse of common land sloping upward towards the western sky, and only broken here and there by a quarry or a patch of water.

"It looks bleak and barren enough," thought Francis, with a shudder; "but it's hereabouts that my uncle Oliver picked up a good bit of his money. The tin mines lie out yonder; and the stone quarry in the hollow there brought him in plenty, if folks tell the truth."

Francis Tredethlyn might have echoed the boast of Helen Macgregor had he chosen, and with stronger justification than that lady, for the earth upon which he trod was not only his native land but his own peculiar property, by virtue of certain yellow-looking parchments under the sign-manual of an Earl and Baron of Landresdale who flourished in the reign of James I. and by payment of an eccentric annual tribute in the shape of a young doe and a hundredweight of virgin tin. It was all his own, this bleak waste land which Francis Tredethlyn, late private soldier in her Majesty's service, late valet to a capricious master, now trod under his feet. Nor was it the less to be considered for its barrenness of aspect, for rich metals lay deep below the heathery surface, in mines that were amongst the oldest and most valuable in Cornwall.

But Francis Tredethlyn was in no wise elated or disturbed by the importance of his possession. He had never felt any ardent desire for wealth, and as yet he had not begun to realize its manifold advantages. He saw the effect of his fortune upon other men, and smiled at their weakness; but what had been true of him in the first hour of his altered position was true of him now,—he had no power either to realize or rejoice in the extent of his riches.

He walked slowly across the barren moorland, always upward, always mounting towards a long ridge of western hill, behind which two streaks of yellow light stretched low against the darkening sky,—a bleak, bare-looking hill, that seemed the very end of the world. It was upon this hillside that Tredethlyn Grange had been built four centuries ago, in the days when men built their houses with a view to endurance; and it stood there still, a long gray tenement of moss-grown stone, with narrow casement windows, looking darkly out upon the twilight moor. The larger portion of the old house had been uninhabited during the tenantship of the Tredethlyns, who, in a spirit of economy, had located themselves in the inferior rooms lying at one end of the rambling mansion. It was in one of these rooms that a light now twinkled faintly; and it was towards this end of the house that Francis Tredethlyn directed his steps. There had been a moat once on two sides of the house, but cabbages now grew upon the sloping earth. There had been a garden once before the Grange, and an old stone sun-dial still marked the spot; but of all the trim flower-beds and angular paths there remained no vestige now. A field of trefoil, bounded by a low stone wall, lay beyond two broken pillars that had once supported a pair of handsome gates; and the sheep browsed close beneath the dim latticed windows.

"It seems like the end of the world to me to-night," thought Mr. Tredethlyn; "and yet once it was comfortable and home-like enough, when I sat with Susy of a night by the fire in the kitchen, while she darned the old man's gray worsted stockings. And to think that he had such oceans of money all that time, and yet seemed almost to grudge his only child every gown she wore, and every bit of bread she put into her mouth." The young man was close to the familiar threshold by this time. He knocked at a low, narrow door in the neighbourhood of the one dimly lighted window, and then drew back a few paces, looking up at the old-fashioned casements.

"This is the window of Susy's room," he thought. "How black and dark it looks to-night! I remember coming up here the night before I ran away to Falmouth to enlist. I remember standing by the low wall yonder, in the cold autumn night, looking up at that very window. There was a light burning then, and I thought of how I should see it burning just the same when I came back, and how I'd throw a handful of earth up at the old window, and Susy would look out, startled and wondering, to find her faithful sweetheart come back to her from the end of the world. And now it's this place that seems like the end of the world somehow, and I'm every bit as far from Susy now as ever I was out yonder."

The door was opened only a very little way, and a woman's

face, so hard and angular that it seemed almost to cut into the dusky atmosphere, peered out at the traveller.

"What do you please to want, sir?" she asked, suspiciously.

"I want to ask you a few questions, Martha Dryscoll. I've come from the Antipodes to ask them."

"Mr. Tredethlyn!" cried the woman, opening the door to its widest extent; "Mr. Francis Tredethlyn come home to his own like a ghost in the night! I make so bold as to bid you welcome, sir. Your uncle's empty chair stands ready for you. The house seems strange and lonesome without him."

It was not everybody who would have ascribed to Mr. Oliver Tredethlyn the power to enliven any house with the smallest ray of cheerfulness, or brighten any fireside with so much as the faintest glimmer of light. But Martha Dryscoll spoke in all good faith. She had believed in her master, and had worked for him, and pinched for him, and half-starved herself and other people for his sake, throughout five-and-thirty years of the dreariest and hardest life that woman ever endured. He had picked her up, starved and almost dying, upon a high road near one of his outlying farms, and had taken her from field-labour and all its attendant pains, to be his housekeeper and—slave; and she had repaid this favour a thousandfold by a devotion that knew no weariness, and a rigid economy that extended itself to the saving of a grain of salt in the old spindly-legged leaden saltcellars.

Oliver Tredethlyn had not been actuated by any Quixotic motive in this eccentric choice of a servant. He took his house-keeper from the wayside because he saw in her a stuff he had vainly sought in the pampered menials who had hitherto presented themselves to his notice. He had been attracted to Martha in the first instance by her gaunt face and gaunter figure, which would have been sufficiently alarming in one of King Frederick William's chosen grenadiers. He had been attracted still more by her curt answers to his curt questions, in which she told him that she had walked thirty miles that day before lying down, as she believed, to die; that she had walked twenty miles the day before, and five-and-twenty the day before that; that she had not tasted food for the last eight-and-forty hours; and that she had worked in the fields and lived upon an average of two-pence a day ever since she could remember.

It was upon this that a bargain was struck between Oliver Tredethlyn, of Tredethlyn Grange, of the one part, and Martha Blank, Martha Anybody, of the other part, for the poor creature had no knowledge of any special surname to which she might lay claim. She had been called Carroty Jane in one place because her hair was red and her name was not Jane. She had been called Gawkie Bet, and Lanky Poll, at other places, on

account of her abnormal height ; but the name she had received in the Union, where her earlier years had been passed, was Martha, and it was this name which she herself recognised as her legitimate appellation. She went home with Oliver Tredethlyn in one of his empty waggons, and ate her first spare meal in the Grange kitchen before nightfall ; and from that hour until the old man's death she served him well and faithfully. She lived with him all the days of his bachelorhood, and resignedly united herself to his bailiff when he commanded her so to do. This faithful creature welcomed Mr. Tredethlyn's wife when he took it into his head to bring home a small tenant-farmer's pretty daughter, who had been forced into a marriage with a man whom she detested ; and, faithful and untiring to the last, this tough-handed, brawny-armed servant watched by the young wife's sick bed during those dull years in which she slowly withered and faded, from a fresh, blooming girl, into a prematurely old woman, and so sank by lingering stages into an early grave, leaving behind her one only child, whose infancy and girlhood were brightened by no softer light than such as might be shed from the grim, grenadier-like affection of Martha Dryscoll.

Jonathan Dryscoll, the farm-bailiff whom Oliver Tredethlyn had desired his housekeeper to marry, was ten years younger than his wife, and was so poor and weak a creature morally and physically in her hands, that he seemed at least half a century her junior. If she told him to do anything, he did it. If she told him to think anything, he thought it; or would have done so, if the mental exercise had not been generally beyond the scope of his faculties. He was as honest and faithful as Martha herself ; but if Martha had told him to go and fire all the ricks on Oliver Tredethlyn's property, he would have done it with the blind trustfulness of a princess in a child's story-book, who obeys the eccentric behests of a fairy godmother. That Martha Dryscoll could do anything wrong, or think anything wrong, was an hypothesis which Jonathan her husband had never contemplated. Perhaps the pleasantest thing about this couple was that there was no disagreeable evidence of Martha's authority. Indeed, that worthy woman was most punctilious in respect to her liege lord and husband, whom she always spoke of as "the master." Jonathan obeyed and trembled, but the sceptre which his wife wielded was an invisible one, and the chains that bound her slave were as impalpable as if they had been fashioned of cobwebs.

Martha Dryscoll was not renowned for her capacity of expressing any species of emotion ; but some faint ray of pleasure kindled in her grim face as she conducted Francis Tredethlyn through the kitchen to an apartment that had served as a kind of state chamber for three generations of his race. She set the

candle on the polished mahogany table, and, folding her arms, contemplated the new master of the Grange at her leisure. In that dim light, in her quaint, scanty dress, with a brown background of oaken wainscot behind her, she looked like a quaint figure in one of Jan Steen's pictures, a hard-faced, angular housewife, honest, laborious, and economical, with her ear perpetually open to the leaking of beer-barrels, or the boiling-over of soup-kettles; her eye ever on the alert to perceive waste or destruction.

"I wish you welcome, Mr. Tredethlyn," she said; and then, with something like sadness in her tone, "If the money *was* to go away from her, better that it should go to you than to strangers. I don't think that you'd turn your back upon her, if she was to need your help; would you now, Mr. Francis?"

"Turn my back upon her!" cried the young man,—"turn my back upon my cousin Susy! Do you think I want the money that ought to have been hers? With God's blessing, I will go to the end of the world to find my poor little girl. But tell me—tell me all about it, Martha. I know you are a good creature. I know you were fond of Susan, though you seemed hard and stern, like the old man. Tell me all you know about my lost cousin, and don't fear but I'll make good use of my knowledge."

"It isn't much I have to tell, sir," answered the housekeeper, very gravely. "You remember old Mr. Restwick, of Pen Gorbald. Folks say that he's almost as rich as our master was. However it is, he and master were always fast friends; and when Mrs. Restwick had been dead a little over a twelvemonth, he and master seemed to get friendlier than ever, and was always laying their heads together about something, old Restwick hanging about this place, and sitting in our kitchen, and in this very room—for master made quite a fuss with the old man, and would sit in the parlour on his account—all the summer time. Miss Susan usen't to like the old man, but she daredn't say as much, seeing as he was her father's friend. Heaven, as looks down upon me, knows, Mr. Francis, than the real reason of old Restwick pottering about our place night after night never came into my head, no more than if it had been so much Greek or Latin. But one night—one quiet summer evening, after such a day as to-day—the truth came out all at once; and it came upon Susan Tredethlyn as it came upon me—like a thunderbolt. Can you guess what it was, Mr. Francis?"

"No!" exclaimed the young man, staring at Martha Dryscoll with a bewildered expression on his face.

"Nor any one else, Mr. Francis, that wasn't so wrapped up in the love of his money that the very heart inside of him had turned to stuff as hard as his golden guineas, or harder; for

there's some kind of furnace as will melt *them*, isn't there, Mr. Francis? On the night I am telling you of, my master told Susan the meaning of old Restwick's visits. She was to marry him—poor, pretty young thing. He'd promise to make such and such—settlements—I think master called 'em, and she'd be mistress of Pen Gorbald farm, and one of the richest women in this part of the country. The poor dear only gave one shriek, Mr. Francis, and fell down upon the floor at her father's feet as white and as quiet as a corpse."

"The hard-hearted villain!" cried Francis, pacing up and down the room; "the infernal villain!"

"She didn't lie there long; she wasn't let to do that. Mr. Tredethlyn lifted her up by the arm, and set her on her feet, fierce and savage-like; and when she opened her eyes, and looked about her, all stupefied and bewildered, he began to talk to her. It was cruel talk to hear from a father to his child; it was a cruel sight to see her trembling and shivering, and only held from falling by his hard hand clenched upon her arm. I tried to interfere between them, Mr. Francis; but my master let his daughter drop into a chair, and pushed me out of the room. Me and Jonathan was sleeping in the room over the stables then, and Mr. Tredethlyn took me by the shoulders, and put me out of the door that opens from the kitchen into the stone-yard at back. I heard the door bolted against me, and I knew I could be no help or comfort to that poor child all night. The door's thick, but I could just hear Susan Tredethlyn's sobs now and then, like as if they'd been blown towards me on the winds, and her father's voice speaking loud and stern; I listened till all seemed quiet, and I was in hopes his heart was softened towards her. But when I got up at four o'clock next morning—for it was harvest-time, and we were very busy—Susan Tredethlyn's room was empty, and the front door was unlocked and unbolted. She'd run away, Mr. Francis; she'd let herself out some time in the night, and run away. There was a little scrap of a shawl she used to wear hanging to the latch of the door. That was bad news for me to tell my master, Mr. Francis; but I had to tell it. He turned white, and glared at me for a minute just like a wild beast, and there was a choking, gurgling kind of noise in his throat. But he was as quiet after that one minute as if he had been made of iron. 'So much the better, Mrs. Dryscoll,' he said, 'an undutiful daughter isn't worth the meat she eats.'"

"But he went after her," said Francis; "surely he made some attempt to bring her back? He didn't let a poor ignorant girl go out into the world without a friend—without a sixpence?"

"She had a little money, Mr. Francis. Her father had given her a sovereign on her birthday every year for the last

ten years, making her promise to save the money. She had saved the money, for she had no chance to spend it, poor child; and she took that money with her, for when I looked about her room I missed the little box she used to keep it in. As to looking for her, Mr. Tredethlyn never stirred hand or foot to do it, though I went on my bended knees to him, begging and praying of him to bring her back. As to me, Mr. Francis, I'm but a poor ignorant countrywoman, that never learned to read and write till I was getting on for thirty; but I got my husband to go to Falmouth with an advertisement for the county paper, saying as 'S. T. was to remember she had a true friend in M. D., and was to be sure and write to her whenever she wanted help.' I daredn't say more, sir; and I think when master saw that advertisement he knew what it meant, for he glared at me across the paper, just as he glared at me when I told him his daughter was gone."

"And he never relented—he never softened towards that poor unhappy girl?"

"For three years, sir, he never mentioned her name. Night after night he'd sit and write, and make out his accounts, and calculate his profits, and such-like, and he'd talk to me fast enough about the business of the farm; but he never spoke his daughter's name. One day he got a letter directed in her hand. I took it from the postman at Landresdale myself one afternoon when I was down there marketing, and I wrote down the post-mark that was on it, and that was all I ever knew of that letter. When my master saw the hand, he came over all of a tremble like, and there was something awful in the sight of that stern old man trembling and shivering like as if he had been stricken by the palsy; but he got over it in a minute, and read the letter, me watching him all the time. If his face had been stone, it couldn't have told less. He crumpled up the letter and put it in his pocket, and for three months he never spoke of that nor of his daughter. Yet I knew somehow that he thought of her; for a kind of change came over him, and he seemed always brooding, brooding, brooding; and he'd start up all of a sudden when we was all sitting of a night quiet in this kitchen—he'd start up as if he was going right away, and then heave a long sigh, and sit down again. But he never said anything about what was in his thoughts, till one morning he came to me, and said very quietly, 'Pack me some clothes in a carpet-bag, Mrs. Dryscoll. I'm going to London to look for my daughter.' My husband and him went on foot down to Landresdale to catch the Falmouth coach; but our master never came back. The next news as we heard of him, Mr. Francis, came to us a month after he'd left. It was a letter from the lawyers, to say that Mr. Oliver Tredethlyn was dead."

"And is that all?"

"Yes, Mr. Francis; I can tell you no more. My master was a good master to me, and I served him faithfully, and worked hard to save his money. But things have all seemed to come before me in a new light since that night when I saw Susan Tredethlyn fall white and cold at her father's feet, and him without pity for her. It seems as if I'd been stone-blind up to that time, Mr. Francis; and my eyes was opened all of a sudden; and I saw that we'd been all wicked heathens, making an idol out of money that had never brought happiness or comfort to any living creature; least of all to ourselves. I saw it all at once that night, Mr. Francis, and I knew that our lives had been wrong somehow."

Martha Dryscoll spoke very earnestly. She was a good woman, after her own manner; eager to do her duty to the uttermost, grateful for small favours, faithful and affectionate. A noble heart beat in that grenadier-like form, a gentle spirit looked out of those hard gray eyes. She told the story of her young mistress's flight with a sorrowful solemnity, undisturbed by tears. Perhaps her hard childhood, her bitter youth, her joyless middle life had dried up the source of that tender womanly emotion; for Martha Dryscoll had never been seen by living witnesses to shed a tear. She unlocked a grim-looking workbox, and took from it a little pocket-book, out of which she tore a leaf.

"That's the name that was on the post-mark, Mr. Francis," she said, handing the paper to Mr. Tredethlyn.

The young man read the word Coltonslough.

"Coltonslough," he repeated, "I never heard of a place of that name. But I'll find it, if it's the most obscure spot upon the earth. God bless you, Martha Dryscoll, for I believe you're a good woman."

He held out his hand, and grasped the housekeeper's bony fingers as he spoke.

"We've been awaiting—me and the master—for orders from you as to what we was to do, sir. We're ready to serve you faithful, if you want our service; but we're ready to leave the old place, if we're any burden upon you. You'll be coming to settle here, maybe?"

"No," answered Francis Tredethlyn, with something of a shudder. "If I'd found Susan here, as I once thought to find her, I should have been glad enough to settle somewhere in these parts. As it is, there's something in the place that gives me the heartache, and I doubt if I shall ever come near it again. Whatever wages you and your husband had in my uncle's time shall be doubled from to-night, Mrs. Dryscoll; and if my cousin Susan is still alive, and should ever find her way

back to this place, I should like her to see a light burning in the old window, and to find a faithful friend ready to bid her welcome home."

Francis Tredethlyn did not linger very long in the house where a great part of his boyhood had been spent. Martha's husband came in presently, smelling very strongly of cowhouse and stable, and the two would fain have given Mr. Tredethlyn a detailed account of their stewardship: but the young man had no heart to listen to them. What did it matter to him that he was the poorer by the death of an Alderney cow on the pasture-farm down in the valley, or the richer by a great sheep-shearing season on the hill? He came home to find no creature of his kith or kin. He stood as much alone in the world as Adam before Eve was created to bear him company; and he felt very desolate in spite of his thirty thousand a year.

He walked back to Landresdale across the bleak moorland under the still summer night. Away in the distance he saw the dark expanse of purple ocean melting imperceptibly into purple sky: and vague and dim as that shadowy distance seemed the unknown future that lay before him. He slept at the Crown, and left Landresdale early the next morning by the Falmouth coach, journeying Londonward: but he had by no means abandoned his search for Susan Tredethlyn.

## CHAPTER VII.

### MAUDE HILLARY'S ADORERS.

FROM the bleak moorland on the Cornish hills, where no tree can flourish, and where the sweeping breath of the salt sea-breeze nips the tender verdure, and makes the quiet sheep wink again as they look oceanward; from the hilly district beyond Landresdale, which seems like the end of the world, and is at any rate the finishing-point of this British Isle, to the valley of the Thames, the sheltered and lovely hollow nestling under the wooded heights about the Star-and-Garter, is about as great a change of scene as all England can afford. It is like the pushing away of some battered front scene which has done duty for the blasted heath near Forres, whereon Macbeth met the witches, since the days when Garrick himself represented the ambitious Thane, to reveal a glimpse of fairyland fresh from the pencil of Mr. Beverley, with sunlit cascades glimmering here and there amongst the verdant valleys, and forest-trees reflected in the calm bosom of a lake.

Mr. Hillary's place lay in a sheltered bend of the river, nearer to Isleworth than to Twickenham—a spot where the trees grew thicker and the shadows fell darker on the quiet water, and the

plash of oars was less often heard, than higher up the river, Mr. Hillary's house and Mr. Hillary's garden seemed to have nestled into the shadiest and most verdant nook along the river-bank. It was called the Cedars, and it was a very old place, as any place so called should be. It was called the Cedars by virtue of the great trees whose spreading branches made patches of dense shadow on the lawn; and not by the caprice of a cockney builder, who christens his shelterless houses indifferently after the noblest trees of the forest. The house was an old red-brick mansion, long and low and irregular; and there is no kind of window invented for the admission of the light of heaven, and there is no species of blind devised by ingenious artisan for the exclusion of that light when it becomes obnoxious, which did not adorn and diversify the glowing crimson of the façade. Oriel windows and Tudor windows; long French windows of violet-stained glass, tiny diamond-paned casements, and noble jutting-out bays; windows with balconies, and windows with verandahs; striped linen blinds of crimson and white, and Venetian shutters of dazzling green; windows leading into conservatories, and windows opening into aviaries,—all combined to bewilder the eye of the stranger who stood upon the lawn by the river looking up at Mr. Hillary's mansion.

Perhaps there never had been any where else so many flowers, and birds, and gold-fish, and pet dogs, collected together in an area of two acres and a half. Banks of particoloured blossoms blazed in the sunshine on the lawn tier above tier, like the bonnets on the grand stand at Ascot on a Cup day; marble basins of limpid water and tiny trickling fountains twinkled and glittered in every direction; fragile colonnades of delicate ironwork, overhung with jasmine and clematis, honeysuckle and myrtle-blossom, led away to bowery nooks upon the broad terrace by the river; and what with the perfume of a million flowers, the gurgling of blackbirds and thrushes, the carolling of skylarks, the shrill whistling of a grove of canaries, the cooing of tropical love-birds, the screaming of paroquets, and the barking of half-a-dozen excited lapdogs, the stranger, suddenly let loose in Mr. Hillary's river-side Eden, was apt to yield himself up for the moment to a state of confusion and bewilderment.

The place was in itself bewildering enough for the ordinary mind; without Miss Hillary—without Miss Hillary! But when Miss Hillary came sailing out of a drawing-room window, with diaphanous draperies of white and blue fluttering and spreading round her, and with all manner of yellow, gold, and purple enamel absurdities dangling at her wrists, and depending from the loveliest throat and the pinkest ears in Christendom,—the stranger who was not provided with forty thousand a year and a coronet, the which to lay at the feet of that adorable creature,

was the weakest of fools if he did not take to his heels there and then, and fly from the Cedars, never to return thither. If he stayed, he fully deserved his fate. If, looking at Maude Hillary, and knowing that he could never hope to win her for his own, he did not straightway flee from that flowery paradise beside the sunlit river, all after-agonies endured by his luckless heart were only the natural consequence of his mad temerity. But then, unhappily, there are so many mad men in the world. Homburg and Baden-Baden are dangerous places, but there are crowds of deluded creatures who will haunt the dazzling halls of the Kursaal, and the elegant saloons of M. Benazet, so long as the fatal wheel revolves, and the croupier cries, "Make your game, gentlemen; the game is made." What can be a more absurd spectacle than a big blundering moth whirling and fluttering about the flame of a candle? Yet the incineration of moth A will not be accepted as a warning by moth B, though he may be a witness of the sacrifice. Younger sons and briefless barristers, earning a fluctuating income by the exercise of their talents in light literature; artists; curates, hopeless of rich preferment,—came, and saw, and were conquered. The man who, being a bachelor and under thirty years of age, beheld Maude Hillary, and did *not* fall in love with her, was made of sterner stuff than the rest of his race, and must have had in him the material for a Cromwell or a Robespierre. He must have been a stony, incorruptible, bilious creature, intended to hold iron sway over his fellow-men; he had no business in the paradise between Isleworth and Twickenham.

Shall I describe Maude Hillary as she sails across the lawn this July morning? I use the word 'sail,' as applied to this young lady's movements, advisedly; for there was a swimming, undulating motion in her walk, which was apt to remind one of a lovely white-sailed yacht gliding far out across an expanse of serene blue water on a summer's day. Shall I describe her? No; if I do, stern critics will tell me that she is a very commonplace young person after all, when it is only my description that will be commonplace. Her complexion was specially fair and bright; but it was not because of her fair skin that she was beautiful. Her features were delicate and harmonious; but those who admired her most could scarcely have told you whether her nose was nearer to the Grecian or the Roman type; whether her forehead was low or high, her chin round or pointed. She was bewitching, rather than beautiful. For if Paris awarded the apple on purely technical grounds, a thousand lovely English women might have disputed the prize with Maude Hillary. But I think Paris would have wished to give her the apple, if only for the pleasure of seeing her bright face light up into new radiance with the joy of her triumph; though in strict justice

he might feel himself obliged to bestow the fruit elsewhere. Miss Hillary was bewitching; and people saw her, and fell in love with her, and bowed themselves down at her feet, long before they had time to find out that she was not so very beautiful after all.

She came winding in and out among the flower-beds now, and betook herself towards an open temple at one end of the terrace by the river—a temple of slender marble columns, entwined with ivy and beautiful ephemeral parasites, whose gaudy blossoms relieved the sombre green. Two gentlemen, who were disporting themselves with lawn billiards, deserted that amusement and strolled over to the temple. They went slowly enough, because they held it vulgar to be in a hurry, and they were very young, and very much used up as to all the joys and sorrows and excitements of this earth; but they were over head and ears in love with Miss Hillary notwithstanding.

She was not alone. She never was alone. She had for her constant associates from four to half-a-dozen pet dogs, and Miss Julia Desmond, her companion. Miss Desmond was by no means the despised companion so popular in three-volume novels. She was a very dignified young lady, whose father had been a colonel in ever so many different armies. She was one of the Desmonds of Castle Desmond, near Limerick, and there were three peerages in her family, to say nothing of one extinct earldom, forfeited by reason of high treason on the part of its possessor, the revival of which, for his own benefit, had been the lifelong dream of Patrick Macnamara Ryan O'Brien Desmond, until death let fall a curtain on that and many other fond delusions which had survived unchanged and changeless to the last in the eternal boyhood of an Irishman's nature.

Julia was a very dignified young lady, and had been highly educated in a Parisian convent, whence she had returned to the south of Ireland to find the impress of decay upon every object around her, from the grass-grown roofs of the cottages in the lane below the castle-boundary to the shattered figure of the brave old colonel. She returned in time to attend her father's death-bed, to which Lionel Hillary, his oldest friend and largest creditor, was summoned by an imploring letter from the old colonel. To Mr. Hillary the old man confided his penniless daughter. He had nothing to leave her but a set of old-fashioned garnet ornaments which had belonged to her mother, and to which he fondly alluded as the "fam'ly jools;" he had nothing to leave her except this antique trumpery and his blessing; but he confided her to his largest creditor, having a vague impression that the largeness of the debt and the heavy interest he would have given upon all the money lent him by his friend, had he ever lived to return the principal, laid Mr. Hillary under

a kind of obligation to him. However it was, the London merchant promised to be a friend and protector to Julia Desmond; and as soon as the colonel's funeral was over carried her back to London with him, and established her in his own house, as the companion of his daughter. A young lady more or less was of little consequence in such an establishment as the Cedars; so the merchant thought very lightly of what he did for Miss Desmond, and Maude Hillary was delighted to have a friend who was to be her perpetual companion; a friend who could sing a good second to any duet, and was never out of time in "Blow, gentle gales," whenever a masculine visitor with a good bass organ was to be procured for the third in that delicious glee. The two girls drove together, and walked together, and rode together, and played duets on one piano and on two pianos, or a harp and piano; and went out together to make water-colour sketches of their favourite bends in the river, with very blue water and very green willows, and a man in a scarlet jacket lazily pushing a ferry-boat away from the shore, and a Newfoundland dog, very black and white and spotty, lying on the bank.

Julia Desmond led a very pleasant life, and there were people who said that the colonel's daughter was a most fortunate person; but for Julia herself there was just one drop in the cup which was bitter enough to change the flavour of the entire draught. She was *not* Maude Hillary. That was Miss Desmond's grand grievance. She brooded over it sometimes when she brushed her hair of a night before the big looking-glass in her pretty chintz-curtained chamber at the Cedars. Maude had two cheval glasses that swung upon hinges at each side of her dressing-table, and Maude had her own maid to brush her hair; but Julia was fain to smooth her own dark tresses. Miss Desmond thought of her grievance very often of a night, when she contemplated her face by the light of a pair of wax candles, and pondered upon the events of the day. She was not Maude Hillary. She was not sole heiress to one of the largest fortunes—so ran the common rumour—ever won by City merchant. She had not received half the attention that had been bestowed upon Miss Hillary during that day. And if not, why not? Was it because she was less good-looking? Certainly not. Miss Desmond was a handsome girl, with bold, striking features, and her black eyes flashed indignation upon the other eyes in the glass at the mere thought of any personal superiority on the part of Maude Hillary. Was it because she was less accomplished? No, indeed. Whose thumbs were the strongest and did most execution in a fantasia by Thalberg? Whose right little finger was clearest and steadiest in a prolonged shake? Whose figures in a water-colour sketch stood firmest on their legs? Miss Desmond's, of course. But Maude was rich, and Julia was poor;

and the meanness of mankind was testified by the absurd devotion which they all exhibited for the heiress. Julia was really fond of Maude, and thought her tolerably pretty; but she did not comprehend the grand fact that Miss Hillary was one of the most fascinating of women, and that she herself was not. She was handsome and stylish, and accomplished and well-bred, but she was not bewitching. When Maude spoke in a friendly manner to any masculine acquaintance he was apt to be seized with a mad impulse that prompted him to kiss her there and then, though eternal banishment from her divine presence would be his immediate doom. Even women had something of the same feeling when Miss Hillary talked to them; and perhaps this may be attributed to the fact that her mouth was the best and most expressive feature in her face. Such heavenly smiles, such innocently and unconsciously bewitching variations of expression played perpetually about those lovely rosy lips, that the harshest woman-hater might have been betrayed into the admission that amongst nature's numerous mistakes Maude Hillary's creation was an excusable one. Fortune-hunters, who came with mercenary aspirations, remained to be sincere. Rich young stockbrokers, who speculated amongst themselves upon the extent of Lionel Hillary's wealth, would have gladly taken Maude to wife, "ex everything." But Julia Desmond could not understand all this, and she regarded her benefactor's daughter as a feminine image of the golden calf, before which mercenary mankind bowed down in servile worship.

The two girls seated themselves in the little temple, and the two worshippers came round and performed their homage. But Miss Hillary had more to say to her dogs than to the loungers on the lawn.

"Good morning, Captain Masters.—Floss, you are the naughtiest darling.—Haven't I told you once before, Scrub, that Honiton lace is *not* good to eat?—Papa has not come home yet, I suppose, Mr. Somerset?—That tiresome City makes a kind of orphan of me, doesn't it, Julia? We never have papa to go with us anywhere now, do we, Julia?—No, Peasblossom, anything but a locket with papa's hair in it. *That* must not be worried.—When are we to go to the *fête*, Captain Masters?"

The captain shrugged his shoulders. He was very young, and held every thing upon earth, except Maude, in supreme detestation and contempt.

"As from four to five is about the hottest period in the entire day, I believe the *fête* is supposed to be at its best somewhere between four and five," he said; "we manage these things so remarkably well in England."

"But as the Duke and Duchess are both French, I suppose

the management of the *fête* at the Château de Bourbon is French too, isn't it?" asked Miss Desmond.

Maude was occupied with a Scotch terrier, who was making ferocious snaps at the jasmine trailing from the roof above her. She would have made a charming subject for a modern Greuze, with the dog held up in her hands, and the loose white muslin sleeves falling back from those fair rounded arms in soft cloudy folds.

"The Duke and Duchess are very charming," said Mr. Somerset; "and when one thinks that if they had lived in seventeen ninety-three, instead of eighteen forty-eight, they'd have been inevitably guillotined on the Place Louis Quinze, instead of being comfortably settled in the neighbourhood of Isleworth, one feels an extraordinary kind of interest in them as living illustrations of improvement of the times. But, apart from that, Miss Hillary, don't you think the *fête* a bore? Don't you think any charity *fête* more or less a bore? I can understand people sending you a subscription list, and telling their man to wait in your hall till you write a cheque for them; but I can't understand people choosing the hottest day in a hot summer to parade about a garden, grinning and smirking at one another, and giving exorbitant prices for things they don't want."

"But you mean to go to the *fête*, Mr. Somerset?"

"Most decidedly, if I am to have the honour of going with you—and Miss Desmond."

Miss Desmond, with one flash of her black eyes, expressed her appreciation of the little pause that had preceded Mr. Somerset's mention of her name.

"Yes, I suppose we are to take you with us," Maude answered, with cruel carelessness. "Papa said that if he were not home at three, we were to go without him, and he would meet us at the château,—and it's past three now, I declare, Julia, and we're not dressed," added Miss Hillary, looking at her watch; "and papa is always so particular about punctuality. Wasn't it Lord Nelson who won the battle of Trafalgar through always being a quarter of an hour beforehand? I almost wish the French had beaten him, for then people couldn't have quoted him against one perpetually. Will you order the carriage, Julia, dear?—or will you tell them about it, Mr. Somerset? The landau, with the bays; papa said the bays were to be used today.—Now Julia, dear."

The two girls ran away to dress, and reappeared in about twenty minutes; Julia very splendid in a golden-brown silk dress, and a pale pink bonnet; Miss Hillary in cloud-like garments of lace, or tulle, or areophaone, that were especially becoming to her tall slender figure and the fragile style of her beauty. Maude Hillary was a very extravagant young lady, and

had *carte blanche* at Messrs. Howell and James's, on whose account her father was wont to write heavy cheques at long intervals, without any investigation of the items; but Miss Hillary very seldom wore silk dresses, which are, after all, about the most economical thing a lady can wear. She affected gauzy fabrics, all festoons, and puffings and flounces, which were thrown aside for the profit of her maid after the third time of wearing, and ultimately figured in second-hand wardrobe repositories in the dreariest outskirts of Pimlico. Indeed, one devoted admirer of Miss Hillary, penetrating Vauxhall bridge-wards from Eccleston Square, had been startled by the apparition of his lovely partner at a recent ball dangling limply, rose-buds and all, from a peg in a dingy shop-window.

Maude was very extravagant; but then how could she well be otherwise? Her appreciation of "pounds" was very little above that of Mr. Harold Skimpole. She very rarely had any money; if she wanted shillings, she borrowed them—by the handful—of the housekeeper at the Cedars. But, on the other hand, she had unlimited credit almost everywhere. A beggar, or one of the churchwardens of Isleworth, armed with a plate after a charity-sermon, were about the only persons who ever demanded ready money from her. She had a vague idea that there was no limit to her father's wealth, and that she was to have as much of it as she required for her own uses whenever she married, if he approved of her marriage; and if he did not approve, she would not have the money, and would be poor, and live in a pretty cottage somewhere in the neighbourhood of St. John's Wood, without so much as a pair of ponies to drive in the Park. She looked forward very vaguely to this sort of thing, always believing that the most indulgent of fathers would come by-and-by to smile upon the penniless Harcourt Lowther, and that everything would end happily, as it does in a comedy. She sighed now and then, and told her confidante, Julia, that she was the most miserable of creatures when she thought of poor dear Harcourt slaving himself to death in that dreadful Van Diemen's Land; but, on the whole, she bore her separation from her affianced lover with considerable resignation. Was she not by nature a bright and hopeful creature? and had she not from babyhood inhabited a kind of fairy circle, separated from all the common outer world by a golden boundary, sheltered from every rude breath of heaven by a limitless canopy of bank-notes?

## CHAPTER VIII.

## AT THE CHÂTEAU DE BOURBON.

THE château in which some of the banished descendants of Louis the Great had set up their household gods, in the shape of a most exquisite collection of artistic treasures, was only a mile or so distant from Mr. Hillary's house. It was an old red-brick mansion like the Cedars; and, indeed, the banks of the Thames seem specially rich in red-brick mansions of the Georgian period. It was a noble old house, and had extended itself of late years on either side, until it was almost palatial of aspect. It was a very pretty house, filled to overflowing with art-treasures, about almost every one of which there hung a history as interesting as the object itself. Royalty, the banished royalty of France, inhabited that simple suburban mansion; and on the smooth lawn, where the pennants were flying and the band playing, a quiet-looking gentleman moved about among the visitors, whose grave and noble face was the exact reproduction of another face, to be seen in stained marble under a glass case within the mansion; the face of a gentleman who, in the course of an adventurous career, won some little distinction under the style and title of Henry IV., King of France and Navarre.

It was almost like going back into the past for an hour or so to lounge on that sunny lawn at Twickenham, so strange yet so familiar were some of the names that were heard on the lips of the crowd. There was a mournful kind of interest in those historic titles; and the aspect of the pretty flower-festooned marqueses, where elegant women were charging fabulous prices for all manner of absurdities in the way of Berlin wool, recalled the image of tented plains and fields of cloth-of-gold, in the days when the sons of St. Louis had other and more high-sounding business in this world than such gentle works of charity as occupied them pleasantly enough to-day.

Maude Hillary was in her glory in the gardens of the Château de Bourbon. She had plenty of ready money, for once in a way; a crisp little bundle of five-pound notes, which her father had brought from the City on the previous evening; and she distributed her wealth freely among the fashionable stall-keepers, loading herself and her attendant cavaliers with wax dolls and Berlin-wool work, reticules, antimacassars, painted fire-screens, bottles of toilet vinegar, and feather flowers. She knew a great many people, and she was so bright and animated, and happy-looking, that people who were utter strangers to her watched her with a feeling of interest, and asked one another who she was. She was standing amidst a group of aristocratic acquaintance upon the terrace overlooking the river, when she cried out that

her papa had arrived, and ran away to meet him, leaving Julia Desmond and the two young men behind her.

"An hour after your time, papa," she said, putting both her hands into his; "and I've spent all my money, and I've bought these for you." She flourished a pair of gorgeously-embroidered slippers before his eyes, and then put her arm through his with an air of proprietorship that was as charming as—every thing else she did.

Lionel Hilary, Australian merchant, of Moorgate Street, London, was a handsome-looking man, tall, and stout, and dark, with iron-grey hair and whiskers, and very unlike his daughter in every respect; for the happy brightness which was the chief element of her beauty found no reflection in his face. He looked very grave, and a little careworn; and Maude, watching him closely, said presently,

"I'm afraid you have one of your headaches again to-day, papa?"

"Yes, my dear; I've been working rather hard this morning. Let me introduce you to this gentleman, whom I have induced to come and spend a little of his money for the benefit of the Duchess's poor people."

This gentleman was Mr. Francis Tredethlyn, who had been loitering a little in the rear of Lionel Hillary while the merchant talked to his daughter. The two men had become acquainted with each other in the simplest possible manner. Amongst the property Francis Tredethlyn had inherited from his uncle was a bundle of shares in a certain Australian insurance company of which Mr. Hillary was a director. Francis, wanting to make some inquiry about the shares, had been advised to go to Mr. Hillary, and had done so. He found the merchant very cordial and friendly,—he had found a great many people in these dispositions towards him lately,—and with the frankness natural to him had told a good deal of his story to that gentleman; always avoiding any allusion to his cousin Susan. Lionel Hillary, being much pleased with his manner, and being generally very kind and hospitable to any young men who came in his way, had offered to drive his new acquaintance down to Twickenham.

"You must find London miserably dull at this time of year," he said. "There's a *fête*, or a fancy fair, or something of that kind, our way. I'll drive you down, and you shall dine at my place afterwards."

Thus it was that Francis Tredethlyn found himself upon the lawn before the Château de Bourbon, making what he felt to be a very awkward bow, and most heartily wishing that some convulsion of nature might open a ready-made grave in the smooth turf on which he stood, wherein he might hide himself from the bright eyes of Miss Hillary.

She spoke to him in the easiest, friendliest manner; asked him if he had ever been to the château before; if he liked a fancy fair; hoped he meant to spend EVER so much money. She opened her eyes very wide as she said this, and he saw how blue they were, and then felt an actual blush kindling under his brown skin. Such a woman as this had never before walked by his side, talking to him, and smiling at him. He answered her animated inquiries as best he might, and found himself thinking of all manner of incongruous things,—of Maude Hillary's blue eyes and point-lace parasol, of his own awkwardness and ignorance, of the narrow points of her dove-coloured boots, as they peeped from under her dress now and then, like anything in the world you like except Sir John Suckling's mice, of the old farmhouse on the Cornish moorland, of little Susy in a white dimity sun-bonnet.

He had never been in such a place before, mixing on equal terms with well-dressed men and women, about most of whom even he, in despite of his ignorance, recognized a nameless something that stamped them as superior to the common run of well-dressed people. That in itself was enough to bewilder him. He had never before seen such a woman as Maude Hillary; and even experienced young men from Government offices found Maude Hillary bewildering. He felt terribly embarrassed and out of place; and after undergoing a sharp ordeal on the terrace, where he was introduced to Miss Desmond, and the two young men staying at the Cedars, he was not a little rejoiced to find himself free for a few minutes, while Mr. Hillary and his daughter talked to a group of new arrivals. He strolled away to the end of the terrace, and lounged upon the marble balustrade, looking down at a lane below—a kind of gorge cut through two separate gardens, in which some of the common folks of the neighbourhood were gathered, listening to the music of the band, and staring at the splendid line of carriages waiting for the guests in the gardens above.

"I didn't think I was such a fool as to let my brains be muddled like this by a lot of fine dresses and parasols, and flower-beds, and the playing of a brass band," he thought; "they're flesh and blood, those people, I suppose, like the rest of us. She's flesh and blood, just as much as my mother that's dead and gone, or poor little Susy. But when I looked at her just now, it seemed as if there was a light shining all about her somehow, that almost blinded me. She spoke to me as prettily and as kindly as she spoke to her father; and yet I felt more afraid of her than if she had been my uncle Oliver, and I a little boy again, tumbling down his corn in the valley farm."

He moved a little way from the balustrade, and stood looking rather sheepishly towards the group he had left, doubtful

whether he was expected to rejoin them, or to stroll about by himself, amusing himself as he pleased. He would have given a great deal of money for the poorest treatise on etiquette which would have told him as much as this; and in the mean time he lingered where he was, twirling a very big pair of lavender gloves which he had bought—through the agency of Mr. Hillary's groom, and with no reference to their adaptability to his own hands—on the way down.

Lingering thus, doubtful of himself, and painfully conscious of being very much out of keeping with the scene around him, he still thought of all manner of incongruous things; and among other fancies one special thought, which could have had no possible connection with the events of the day, kept surging upwards on the troubled sea of his reflections.

"I never loved my cousin Susan," he thought; "I know now that I never really loved my cousin Susan."

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## CHAPTER IX.

### JULIA DESMOND MAKES HERSELF AGREEABLE.

CAPTAIN MASTERS drove Lionel Hillary's phaeton to the Cedars, when the crowd in the sunny gardens before the Château de Bourbon had dispersed, and only a few scattered groups still lingered about the pleasant home of exiled royalty. Amongst which loiterers might be observed some lively gentlemen of the occasional-reporter species, who wanted to ascertain whether there would not be something in the champagne and lobster-salad way before the *fête* was finished. Captain Masters drove his friend Mr. Somerset back to the Cedars in the mail-phaeton, while Lionel Hillary and Francis Tredethlyn went home with the ladies in the landau.

The man who had been a private soldier only a few months before that day, and who had not yet been able to realize the change made in his position by the inheritance of thirty thousand a year, found himself oppressed by a strange feeling as he sat in Miss Hillary's open carriage with his back to the horses, surrounded by billows of silk and lace and muslin, a surging sea of feminine draperies, from which a faint perfume was wafted towards him as the summer wind blew in his face. It was not so much that he was ill at ease in that feminine presence, or in any way daunted by the fire of two pairs of handsome eyes. The feeling which oppressed him was rather a sense of unreality. He was like a child at a pantomime, who sees a stage-fairy for the first time, and cannot believe that the resplendent creature is only flesh and blood. He looked at Maude Hillary, and thought of his cousin Susan's rosy cheeks and

brown hair shaded by the familiar dimity sun-bonnet. There were men in the world who might aspire to marry such a creature as this Miss Hillary. He tried to imagine the sort of man who might lift his eyes to that divinity; and there arose in his mind the picture of a grandiose creature with yellow whiskers and a geranium in his button-hole. The æsthetic element in Mr. Tredethlyn's mind was as yet very imperfectly developed; and his idea of a lover befitting Maude Hillary leaned rather to the gaudy king's-pattern order of mankind.

The Australian merchant sat with his head leaning back against the cushions of the carriage and his eyes closed. His headache was, if anything, worse, he confessed, in answer to Maude's anxious inquiries. He did not speak three times during the homeward drive, and his daughter rarely took her eyes from his face. She was very fond of him, and displayed her affection for him now as frankly as she had done when she had been a little girl in a white frock, sitting on his knee after dinner, and eating unwholesome fruits and confections out of his plate. She watched him now with a tender anxiety in her face, and seemed almost unconscious of the presence of the big soldier-like individual with a bronzed countenance and close-cropped black hair. But Francis Tredethlyn was not entirely neglected, for Miss Desmond appeared determined to atone for Maude's want of courtesy. She had heard the Cornishman's story from Mr. Somerset, who had heard it from a gentleman whom he described as "a fellow in the 11th Hussars;" and the handsome Julia felt some little interest in the hero of the narrative. An ignorant young man, a farmer's son, who has suddenly come into a fortune of thirty thousand a year, is not the sort of person to be met with every day. Julia remembered that dreary ruin, that tall stone gaol on the bare hill beyond Limerick, which sounded so well when casually alluded to as Castle Desmond; but whose image chilled her as it rose, dismal and stony, before her mind's eye. She remembered the muddy roads, the murderous ruts, the broad acres of irredeemable bog, the long rank grass waving on the roofs of tumbledown stone cabins, the gaunt pigs and gaunter peasantry; and a feeling that was not altogether ignoble kindled a sudden flush upon her handsome face. What could not be done for Castle Desmond and those ill-used peasantry by a chieftainess who should have thirty thousand a year at her command! She fancied herself a kind of fairy queen, beneath whose wand pleasant homesteads might arise on those desolate hills, and yellow cornfields spread a golden mantle over the valleys now so bare and empty. Miss Desmond's lot in life was altogether exceptional, and the sentimental dreams which come to some young women had no lodgment in her brain. She looked her fate straight in the face, and was

eager to make the best of any opportunity that might fall in her way. For the present she was very well off where she was; though the worship of the golden calf, as represented by Maude Hillary, was a perpetual abomination to her. But she was tolerably resigned to her present position at the Cedars. It was only in the future that her life looked dark and threatening. She must marry before Miss Hillary,—that was essential,—or else she must resign herself to the miserable position of a companion on sufferance, necessary to Maude, perhaps, but very disagreeable to Maude's husband.

Under these circumstances, a chance visitor at the Cedars with thirty thousand a year for his fortune was not a person to be disdainfully entreated even by the daughter of all the Desmonds: so Julia was very kind to Francis Tredethlyn during that brief homeward drive, asked him all manner of questions respecting his sentiments upon things in general and the charity *fête* in particular, and flashed her handsome eyes and white teeth upon him until he was almost dazzled by their brightness. Miss Desmond had very dark eyes—eyes that seemed of a greenish hazel when you saw them in repose, but which looked almost black when they sparkled athwart a fringe of dusky lashes. She had dark eyes and very white teeth; and the distinguishing characteristic of her face was the contrast between the darkness of one and the white glitter of the other. Mr. Tredethlyn knew that the young lady was very handsome, and that there was some condescension involved in her friendly notice of him; but his eyes wandered away to Maude's fair face and earnest blue eyes, and there was a suspicion of irrelevance in some of his replies to Miss Desmond's animated questions. If he had been less absent-minded, he might have seen that young lady's white teeth close vengefully upon her lower lip as she turned from him after one of those doubtful answers.

The dinner at the Cedars went off very quietly. Mr. Hillary was silent, but hospitable, or at least as much so as a man can be in these days of Russian dinners and vicarious hospitality. Francis had lodged at a comfortable hotel in the regions of Covent Garden since his return from Cornwall, and had in no way altered his simple habits of life; so he was not a little puzzled by the array of glasses by the side of his plate, the lumps of ice which an obsequious attendant dropped ever and anon into his Moselle, the mysterious compounds in silver dishes which he discovered suddenly at his elbow whenever he was most abstracted by the novelty of the scene about him, and the vision of Maude Hillary, sitting on the other side of the round table in a cloud of white and blue. The dishes at that wonderful feast seemed so many culinary conundrums to Mr. Tredethlyn, and I fear that he made some very obvious

mistakes in the management of the spoons and forks perpetually thrust upon him by the stealthy-footed retainers. But the dinner was over at last, and Captain Masters opened the dining-room door for the departure of the ladies, while poor Francis could only sit blankly staring like a countryman at a play. Lionel Hillary did not linger long over his wine; he had some papers to look at in his study, he said, and excused himself on that ground, as well as on account of that obstinate headache of his. The young men seemed very glad to be released from the atmosphere of hothouse flowers and pine-apple, faintly mingled with that odour of the bygone dinner which will hang round the most elegant dining-room, ventilate it as you will. Was not Maude Hillary in the drawing-room, whence already might be heard the sparkling ripple of arpeggio passages upon the piano? The two young loungers followed Mr. Hillary out into the hall, and Francis went with them, uncomfortably conscious of disadvantages not to be outbalanced by the possession of half a million or so in all manner of seven-per-cent-paying investments. The young soldier blacking his master's boots had been the easiest-mannered of mankind; but Oliver Tredehlyn's heir felt terribly embarrassed in Maude Hillary's presence—only in her presence; he was not at all abashed by Miss Desmond's eyes and teeth, though all their contrastive brightness was brought to bear upon him. Maude was at the piano, and Julia was bending over a stand of engravings. It may be that she had not very long fallen into that graceful attitude. When the three young men entered the room she looked up, and Mr. Tredehlyn meeting her friendly glance, and being considerably at a loss what to do with himself, went over to her, and found a comfortable haven in a low easy-chair near the couch on which she was sitting.

"Do you care much for Leech, Mr. Tredehlyn?" she asked, as she turned over the leaves of a portfolio reprinted from *Punch*.

The young man looked rather puzzled by this question.

"I don't care much for them," he answered, frankly. "I never had any but once, and that was in Van Diemen's Land, when I had the fever,—fifteen of them on my temples, and that was no joke, you know, Miss Desmond."

He was quite at his ease with Julia; but he would not for the world have been so confidential to Maude Hillary. Miss Desmond laughed good-naturedly.

"I don't mean those horrible creatures that they put on one's temples," she exclaimed, "but Mr. John Leech, the caricaturist. You must have seen *Punch*, even in Van Diemen's Land?"

"Oh, yes! my mas—superior officer used to get it from his mother every mail."

He took the portfolio from Miss Desmond, and turned over

the leaves: but he only stared absently at Mr. Leech's most brilliant performances, and his eyes wandered away every now and then to the piano, where Maude Hillary was skimming through the gems of a new opera and dallying with her two adorers, deliciously unconscious of their adoration. Had she not inhabited an atmosphere of universal admiration and affection ever since she had exhibited her pink cheeks and infantile ringlets in company with the seven-shilling March peaches and five-guinea pine-apples, after her father's pompous dinners, to be admired by ponderous old City magnates in the pauses of solemn discussions upon the rate of discount and the last grand crash on the Stock Exchange?

Julia Desmond, always observant—cursed, perhaps, with an especial faculty for penetrating all unpleasant secrets lying hidden under the many masks which society has invented for the convenience of mankind—Miss Desmond, I say, was not slow to perceive the Cornishman's preoccupation, nor slow to credit Miss Hillary with another item in that heavy account so long standing between them.

"Even this country boor, with a great fortune of his own, must pay his meed of homage to the millionaire's daughter," thought Julia. "Is there some magical power in the possession of money which imparts a kind of fascination to the possessor?" Colonel Desmond's daughter had felt some of the keenest stings of poverty, and it may be that she had grown to entertain an exaggerated estimation of that golden dross which is so paltry a thing when considered in a philosophical spirit. She looked at the young man sitting by her side; and as she looked, a mystic golden halo seemed to arise about him and surround him, until he appeared almost like an old picture of a saint, painted upon a shadowless background of gold. Thirty thousand a year! and he was young, handsome, manly, good-tempered-looking, or even something more than this; for there was a dash of nobility in his simple bearing which scarcely seemed to belong to the runaway son of a small farmer. The good old blood of the Tredethlyns, once squires and landowners of some degree, was not dishonoured by the young man who had blacked Harcourt Lowther's boots in Van Diemen's Land. He was not a gentleman after the manner of the nineteenth century; he seemed rather like a stalwart soldier of the past, simple and daring, frank and generous. Julia, contemplating him always enframed in the golden halo, saw that, with the advantage of a clever woman's training, he might be made a very presentable creature; in spite of that private-soldier story, which, after all, was spiced with a certain flavour of romance.

"People would say I married him for his money," thought Miss Desmond; "but then they would say that if I married a

provincial banker with fifteen hundred a year. Thirty thousand! thirty thousand a year!—and he is not a man who would act meanly in the matter of a settlement—and he could buy the Irish estate for a mere song—and he might call himself Tredethlyn Desmond."

Maude Hillary's companion and friend had employed herself for a very long time in the consideration of one grand subject—her own destiny. For a long time she had estimated every creature who came in her way by one unvarying gauge. Had he, or had he not, any bearing on that supreme question? If the answer were in the negative, Miss Desmond wasted no further thought upon the useless creature. But if she saw in the shadowy distance some possible combination of circumstances in which the individual might become a thread, however slightly interwoven, in the fabric of her destiny, Julia expended her brightest smiles and sweetest words for his gratification.

It was in no way strange, therefore, that the young lady who had given a good deal of attention to hare-brained young ensigns and penniless young curates with nothing better than remote expectations, should consider Mr. Tredethlyn worthy of her most serious deliberation. The present, however, was no time for thought,—for were not the young man's eyes perpetually wandering towards the slender figure under the light of the moderator lamp? Miss Desmond felt there was no time to be lost. Already the rich man had made his election—already he had enrolled himself in the list of Maude Hillary's victims. Another woman, perceiving the state of affairs, might have resigned herself to the loss of this grand chance of winning a rich husband; but Julia's courage was not so easily dashed. It rose, rather, with the thought of contest. Had not her father been a grand old freebooter, boasting of kingly blood in his battered old body, and spilling it under the colours of every rebel army in modern Europe? The Desmond spirit rose in Julia's breast as she saw Francis Tredethlyn's wandering glances, half sheepish, half unconscious.

"I can set myself against her this time," she thought; "and the battle between us will be a fair one. *This* man cannot be a fortune-hunter. We meet on tolerably equal terms for once in a way, Miss Hillary, and let us see who will win."

Julia's dark eyes flashed their brightest as she looked across all the width of the room to the radiant-looking girl at the piano; and then she turned them suddenly upon Francis Tredethlyn, and began to talk to him. She began to talk to him, and, more than this, she made him listen to her. Miss Desmond was a brilliant talker. She possessed that wondrous faculty vulgarly called the gift of the gab,—the power of talking about everything and anything, or even about nothing, for the matter

of that; the power of en chaining a listener in spite of himself, holding him prisoner when he had rather be away, and yet not detaining him an altogether unwilling prisoner;—the power of talking ignorantly, without seeming to be ignorant; speculating ideas and allusions at a venture, and never betraying the shallowness of their nature; assuming an interest in the most uninteresting subject, and never revealing the hollowness of the assumption,—a power, in short, which in its fascination seems like a modern form of those classic philtres which Roman maidens were wont to administer to eligible bachelors in the days when Rome was young. It may be said that Miss Desmond owed this faculty in some degree to her Hibernian ancestry; but no suspicion of their native accent vulgarized her discourse. Only a softer and richer depth in her low voice betrayed her Celtic origin.

Julia began to talk to Francis Trede thlyn, and, in spite of himself, he listened, and was fain to withdraw his gaze from the distant figure at the piano. She talked to him of a soldier's life, jumping recklessly at conclusions, and taking it for granted that he must needs possess some latent spark of military ardour, which would blaze up into a flame under the fire of her enthusiasm. She talked to him of her father, and all those guerrilla warfares in which he had won distinction. She talked of Don Carlos, and Abd-el-Kader, and Garibaldi, whose name had not then the glorious significance which it carries with it to-day. She talked to him like a young Joan of Arc or an embryo maid of Saragosa;—and all that was brightest in Mr. Trede thlyn's nature kindled beneath her influence. Had Francis been a stockbroker, Miss Desmond would have discoursed to him of Lionel Rothschild, or Lafitte, or Mirès; and she would have glowed with just the same enthusiasm, though her theme had been the Stock Exchange or the Bourse.

But in spite of himself Mr. Trede thlyn was pleased and interested. His boyish yearning for a military career had been very nearly trampled out of him during dreary years of marchings and counter-marchings, and sword-exercise, and barrack-tyranny, with never the glimpse of a battle-field, or so much as a brief skirmish with some chance enemy. But those fresh young feelings all came back to him when Julia discoursed in low eloquent accents of her father's foreign experiences. "Ah, that was something like a military career!" thought the young man. "It was such a life that I hoped to lead when I ran away from Landresdale; and I thought I should come back a general, with a cocked-hat and a great plume of feathers, as the gardener's son does in the play I saw once at Falmouth."

And then Francis Trede thlyn, being by nature candid as a schoolboy newly come home for his holidays, opened his heart

to Miss Desmond, and told her a good deal about his life. That dark chamber of his memory in which Susan's image loomed through the sombre shadows he kept religiously sealed from every curious eye. But on all other subjects he was very communicative. He did not tell Julia that he had been Mr. Lowther's body-servant; for there was something in that estate of servitude which had never been entirely pleasant to him, gallantly as he had borne himself under its serious ordeals. He had known poverty, he told Miss Desmond, in all its worst bitterness, and had seen his mother and father die broken-hearted, borne down by a load of petty debt and difficulty, when the loan of a couple of hundred pounds would have saved them.

"I felt altogether desperate one night, Miss Desmond," he said, "when my poor mother was at her worst, and my father sitting in the kitchen as helpless as a child,—almost daft, as they say in the north. I felt desperate somehow, and I went out of the house and ran all the way to Tredethlyn Grange, and asked my uncle Oliver to lend me the money. He laughed in my face, Miss Desmond, and told me he hadn't a five-pound note in the house; and I dare say he spoke the truth, for I think he'd have gone half crazy at the thought of a sovereign lying idle. I went back to the farm, and—my mother died the next day."

He stopped, and sat for some minutes looking at Mr. Hillary's Axminster carpet. Julia did not say anything. She was too perfect a tactician not to know that anything she could say must appear commonplace at such a moment. She only drew a long breath, a kind of fluttering sigh, expressive of the deepest sympathy.

"My mother died, Miss Desmond," the young man went on; "and my father was not slow to follow her. So, having no one in the world to care for, except—except a cousin, who had been like a sister to me, I ran away to Falmouth, and enlisted in a foot regiment, thinking that I had but to pin a bunch of colours in my hat and march straight off to some field of battle. I left Cornwall, Miss Desmond; but I never forgot that night before my mother's death. I've tried to feel grateful to my uncle Oliver for leaving me this fortune, but I can't. I ought to feel grateful, I suppose; but I can't. The memory of that night sours me, somehow. Money seems such paltry stuff, after all, when you think that all the golden coin in this world can't bring back one human creature from the grave."

"Ah, yes, indeed," Miss Desmond murmured, in her tenderest voice.

And then, being blest with a very lively imagination, she found herself wondering whether, if wealth had been potent to

restore the dead, and she had been possessed with wealth, she would have very much cared to awaken Patrick Macnamara Ryan O'Brien Desmond from his quiet slumber in a little church-yard beside the winding Shannon. The old soldier of fortune was better in his grave perhaps, Julia thought, philosophically. She had begun to fight the battle of life on her own tactics, and had no very great opinion of her late father's strategy.

"He was very clever," she thought, with a tender remembrance of the Major's best manœuvres; "but then one so often saw through him. He always started with wrong premises, and fancied everyone but himself was a fool: as if there could be any merit in deceiving only stupid people." Miss Desmond was always wise enough to remember that the larger art of talking well comprehends the smaller art of listening gracefully. She was not one of those obnoxious people who talk for the sake of talking; and who, after rattling on without a full-stop for half an hour at a stretch, will stare vacantly at you while you recite to them some interesting adventure, evidently thinking of what they mean to say next, and waiting for the chance of cutting in. Julia Desmond talked with a purpose,—not because she wanted to talk, but because she wished to please: and now she listened to Francis Tredethlyn with an unfailing show of sympathy and interest, that beguiled him on to tell her more and more. She wound and insinuated herself into his confidence as a beautiful serpentine creature winds itself into the heart of an apparently impenetrable forest; and before the evening was finished Mr. Tredethlyn found himself almost as intimate with this splendid southern Irishwoman as if she had been his sister. She had set him completely at his ease; so that he no longer felt out of place in Mr. Hillary's gorgeous rooms: and when the merchant, coming into the drawing-room at eleven o'clock, very pale and worn-looking, asked him to dine at the Cedars on the following Sunday, Francis unhesitatingly accepted the invitation. He stole just one glance at Maude as he did so; but she was in the act of exhibiting one of the newest accomplishments of a mouse-coloured Skye terrier for the edification of the two young loungers, and she was quite unconscious of that shy look from Mr. Tredethlyn's eyes. He went to her presently to wish her good-night, and the spell of her gracious presence dazed and bewildered him, to the cost of the mouse-coloured terrier, upon whose silky paws he trampled in his embarrassment; and then, essaying to shake hands in a gentlemanly manner, he forgot what a stalwart giant he was, and squeezed the little hand that rested so lightly in his, until Maude's fingers were wounded by the hoops, and clusters, and hearts, and crescents of diamonds and opals which twinkled and flashed upon them;—for Miss Hillary had seen the Marchioness of Lon-

donderry's famous rings, and never wore any vulgar mixture of many-coloured jewels upon her pretty white hands. Francis lingered a little after saying good-night, helpless under the spell of the enchantress, and then made his way somehow or other out of the room. Ah! surely uncle Oliver's money was not such sordid dross, after all, when it was the golden key which admitted him to that paradise on the banks of the Thames.

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## CHAPTER X.

## COLTONSLOUGH.

FRANCIS TREDETHLYN went back to his hotel in Covent Garden after that quiet dinner at the Cedars, and his mind was full of the new images suggested by that brief glimpse of a life that was strange to him. He had been very much interested by Miss Desmond, and he tried to believe that he preferred her to Maude Hillary. Had she not been kinder to him, more friendly and familiar? and was it not reasonable that he should like her the better of the two? He was naturally of a grateful disposition, disposed to think meanly of his own merits; and he attributed all Miss Desmond's kindness to the purest promptings of a benevolent disposition. The idea that the young lady had regarded him from a speculative point of view, that she had entertained any notion of possible marriage contracts and settlements, by which she might acquire the use of his thirty thousand per annum, never for a moment entered Mr. Tredethlyn's mind. He knew, in a general way, that he was admitted to Mr. Hillary's drawing-room because his money gave him a kind of right to such society as that of the merchant's household; but he never for a moment imagined that any one of these delightful and high-bred creatures could contemplate any contingency by which his money might become of service to them. Wealth and beauty, elegance and refinement, seemed to find their natural home at the Cedars. Miss Desmond of course was rich, like Miss Hillary.

Francis counted the days which must elapse before that delightful Sabbath to be spent by him at the Cedars. Only three days, and during those three days stern duty called him away from London. Had he not declared himself ready to go to the end of the world in search of his cousin Susan Tredethlyn? He felt ashamed even of that one wasted day on the banks of the Thames. He had left his hotel in the morning, intending to despatch his City business with all possible speed, and start immediately afterwards for Coltonslough. He had found out all about Coltonslough by means of all manner of inquiries; for it seemed rather an out-of-the-way place, known

to very few people as yet. Indeed, Coltonslough turned out to be a recently discovered watering-place on the Essex coast, a place whose shores were supposed to be washed by the salt waves of the ocean; but the waste of waters that rolled along the muddy shores of Coltonslough was only an ocean in its hobbledehoyhood, and savoured too much of the Thames and Medway to be considered a full-grown sea.

To the traveller who has grown familiar with the centre of Africa; to that bold explorer who has spent lonely days and nights amidst those darksome forests in which the forgotten cities of America lie buried; to the prisoner newly released from solitary confinement in the great prison-house of New York, so pleasantly entitled the Tombs—to one of these a newly discovered watering-place may not appear dull. He who has been used to hear no more familiar voice than the distant cry of the bittern, far away amongst the swampy wildernesses, may endure Herne Bay and live. The criminal who has undergone a decade of solitary confinement in the Tombs may possibly survive a month at Southend: but to the ordinary mind there is a modern abomination of desolation lurking in the unfinished terraces of a budding watering-place, or in a watering-place which has put forth its tender blossoms in the way of bow-windowed receptacles for the concentrated bleakness of perpetual east winds, and has been blighted in the bud.

Coltonslough was very young; it was in the most infantine stage of watering-place existence. Speculative builders had bought half-a-dozen plots of swamp and mud, and had erected dismal rows of houses, which turned their backs upon one another, and started off at right angles from one another, in utter contempt for all uniformity. If the melancholy sojourner at Coltonslough was of an active turn of mind, he was apt to be tormented by a wild desire to pull down and re-arrange those straggling terraces, between which stretched hideous deserts of waste ground, with here and there a lurking pitfall, whence gravel, or sand, or clay, or chalk, had been dug by unknown persons, who seemed always digging something or other out of Coltonslough, whereby an appearance of volcanic disruption was imparted to a place whose chief merit had been its agreeable flatness.

It was very young. A few straggling excursionists came on the blazing summer Sundays, and roamed about the shore with countenances expressive of supreme disappointment and disgust. Half-a-dozen families of cockney children were wont to congregate by the dismal waters every summer, provided with baskets for the collection of shells—and there were no shells at Coltonslough,—and further provided with wooden spades for the undermining of sand—and there was no sand at that baby

watering-place. Families did certainly come, beguiled by representations of impossibly cheap provisions, though the place was in reality very expensive, for every tradesman was a monopolist on a small scale. Families came, but no family ever came a second time to Coltonslough; and it may be that, in the wonderful scheme of the universe, this new-born watering-place was not without its special use; inasmuch as it made people contented with London. The inhabitant of Bermondsey, returning to that locality after a sojourn at Coltonslough, found beauties in some dismal street which until that hour had appeared to his prosaic mind a street, and nothing more. The denizen of Ratcliff Highway sat down amongst his household gods well pleased with a neighbourhood which, although not unobjectionable, was a paradise as compared with Coltonslough.

It was to this place of desolation that a newly-finished off-shoot of the railway then known as the Eastern Counties conveyed Francis Tredethlyn. He went to look for his cousin with no better clue to help him in his search than that one word, "Coltonslough," copied from the post-mark of Susan's letter.

"But I won't be baffled," the young man thought, as he sat in the railway carriage thinking of the task that lay before him. "Coltonslough may be a big place, but I'll question every living creature in it before I'll give up the chance of finding out something about my cousin."

Luckily for Mr. Tredethlyn's chances, Coltonslough was a very small place, and after walking backwards and forwards for some quarter of an hour, before the emporium of the one butcher; the solitary baker, who dabbled a little in the fruit and confectionery line; and the single grocer, who was also a linendraper, and beyond that a stationer, who had a side of bacon hanging on one side of his door, and a piece of showy cotton stuff upon the other, and who moreover was sole master of the Coltonslough post-office,—Francis determined upon his plan of action. He had thought of his cousin very constantly in the few days before his visit to Mr. Hillary's mansion; he had thought of her a great deal since then, though he had not found it quite so easy to concentrate his ideas, by reason of a certain bright face and slender figure all in a flutter of white and blue, that would sometimes intrude themselves upon his meditations.

Francis knew that his uncle's daughter had left Tredethlyn Grange with only a few sovereigns in her pocket, perhaps not much more than enough to defray her journey to London. Without money, without friends, she had fled from her home, and had not perished; but had lived to write to her father from this dismal watering-place of Coltonslough some years after her

**fight.** It was clear, therefore, that in the interim she must have either been supported by the benevolence of strangers, or she must have earned her own living. The last hypothesis was the more likely to be correct. Susan Tredethlyn had been educated to habits of industry, and had no doubt confronted the battle of life as fearlessly as any Tredethlyn should confront any battle.

"Poor little girl! she went out as a servant, I dare say," thought the young man. "She drudged and slaved for some hard mistress, perhaps, while her father was adding every day to the money that has come to me—to me—and he refused me a couple of hundred pounds the night my mother was dying."

Mr. Tredethlyn went in at the grocer's doorway. There was scarcely room enough for him to pass between the bacon and the cotton stuff, which some aboriginal of Coltonslough would some day transform into wearing apparel. The postmaster was chopping some very sallow-hued lump-sugar in the dusky inner-regions of the shop; but he left off chopping, and advanced to meet the stranger.

Francis Tredethlyn was no diplomatist; he was quite un-skilled in that peculiar science known as beating about the bush; so he began to make inquiries respecting his cousin with as little preface as he would have employed had he been asking for a pound of sugar.

"I'm a stranger to this place," he said, "and I want to ask a few questions; and I fancy, as you're postmaster, you must be about the likeliest person to answer them."

The grocer rubbed his hands and smirked, in a manner that was expressive of a general desire to do anything obliging—of course with an eye to ultimate profit.

"A young woman—a relation of mine—left her home four years ago this month. For nearly three years no one belonging to her could discover where she was. At the end of that time a letter was received from her, bearing the post-mark of this place. I want to find out whether she is still here; or, if not, when she left. I have only just come back from Van Diemen's Land, to find things changed in the place that was once my home. So I'm groping in the dark, you see, and shall be very thankful to any one that'll lend me a helping hand."

Something in the frankness of his manner, the earnestness of his face, went straight home to the heart of the Coltonslough postmaster, who became less a tradesman, and more a man.

"It's rather puzzling, you see, in the way you put it," he said, scratching his nose meditatively. "You want a young woman who wrote a letter—or leastways had a letter posted at this place. But, lor' bless you, not being under Government y'rself, you see, you've no notion of the dodges they're up to

when they want to throw any one off the scent like with a post-mark. You mustn't fancy a person's in this place or in that place, because you happen to get a letter from them with such and such a post-mark. Why, I dessay I could get a letter posted from Jericho to-morrow morning, if I only gave my mind to it. What might be the name of the young woman as you're anxious to find?"

"Her name is Tredethlyn," Francis answered, hopelessly; "but as she ran away from home, and most likely wanted to hide herself from her relations, she may have changed her name."

The postmaster mused for a few moments, and then shook his head gravely.

"I never heard of no Tredevillings in Coltonslough," he said "The young person was independent in her circumstances, I suppose?"

"Oh no, indeed! she had very little money when she left home. She must have worked for her living. I should think it likely that she went out for a servant; for she was a country-bred girl, and had been used to a hard life, though her father was a very rich man."

A very rich man! That part of the business sounded interesting, and the grocer pricked up his ears.

"A country-bred young person," he repeated, "by the name of Tredevillane. And what might be the date of the letter with the Coltonslough post-mark?"

Francis did not know the exact date. He could only inform the postmaster that the letter must have reached Cornwall about eighteen months, or it might be rather less than eighteen months, before the present time.

"Cornwall!" cried the postmaster; "then the country-bred young woman was a Cornwall young woman?"

"Yes, my cousin, Susan Tredethlyn, was a Cornish woman."

"A Cornish woman, and by the name of Susan! Why, if you'd put the date of the letter a good three years back instead of a year and a half, I should have been able to lay my hand upon y'r cousin there and then, in a manner of speaking."

"How so?"

"Because I did know a young person that lived with Mrs. Barfield, in Trafalgar Terrace. But that young person left Coltonslough full three years ago, and I've never set eyes on her since."

"But tell me all you know about her!" exclaimed Francis, almost breathless in his eagerness. "What was she like? Why do you fancy that she was the girl I'm looking for?"

"Because, in the first place, she was Cornish. I'd noticed that her talk was different somehow from that of the folks

about here—though she was as soft-spoken as any lady bred and born; but one day she was standing in my shop, with the children as she had care of, taking shelter from a storm—and a regular pelt it was too—and she stood looking out to sea through yonder half-glass door, which it were shut for the time being, and I made some remark about the unpleasantness of the weather, out of politeness like—for the young woman came very often to my shop for groceries, and with lodgers' letters,—Mrs. Burfield takes lodgers, and so forth;—but she looked at me in a kind of absent way, and said ‘Oh, I like it! I like it!’ ‘You like the storm, Miss?’ I exclaimed; and then she answered all of a sudden, ‘Yes, I like to see it. This place doesn't seem so strange to me to-day as it generally does. I have seen just such a storm as this from the moor on which my father's house stands, and I could almost fancy I was at home in Cornwall.’”

“And that's how you found out she was a Cornish woman? I think you've about hit it, Mr. Sanders. I think the girl who talked to you about the storm must have been my cousin, Susan Tredethlyn.”

“Her name *was* Susan,” answered Mr. Sanders; “I've heard Mrs. Burfield's children call her so in this very shop. She came to Coltonslough as governess to Mrs. Burfield's young family.”

“A governess!” said Francis, with some slight sense of relief. “She was a governess, then, and not a servant?”

“Oh dear no! Though Coltonslough being a very small place, you see, sir, and most of the inhabitants being a good deal dependent upon lodgers, which gives a kind of fluctuating character to life, as you may say, sir, a governess in Coltonslough might not be looked upon exactly in the same light as elsewhere. Or, to put it plainer, sir, a governess in Coltonslough would *not* be expected to be proud.”

“Oh, I understand,” Mr. Tredethlyn answered, rather bitterly. “Yes, my cousin was a genteel drudge,—not so well paid, perhaps, as vulgar drudges, and rather harder worked.”

“The young person was always genteel, sir, even to the extent of wearing gloves, which is not looked upon as indispensable in Coltonslough; but in the matter of going errands and opening the door, or carrying in a lodger's tea-tray, at a push, she would *not* be expected to be proud.”

“And she left three years ago?”

“She did, sir.”

The postmaster looked very grave as he said this,—so grave that Francis Tredethlyn could not fail to perceive that something worse than he had yet heard remained to be told. He was not a man to diplommatize, nor yet to make any display of

his emotion; but his breath came a little faster for a few moments, and then he asked abruptly,—

“How did she leave?”

Mr. Sanders hesitated a little, and then said, with some embarrassment,—

“Why, Coltonslough bein’ a gossiping kind of a place, sir, you’re apt to hear ever so many different versions of the same thing, and it isn’t for me to say which is right and which is wrong. I think, as it’s a long story, sir, you’d better hear the rights of it from Mrs. Burfield.”

“A long story!” repeated Francis Tredethlyn, in an undertone,—“a long story! Ah, my poor little cousin—my poor ill-used girl! And it seems only a little while ago when we played together in the churchyard at Landresdale, in the sunny hour when they let us out of school.”

It did seem to him but a very little while since he and his cousin had sat side by side, under one of the big yew-trees in Landresdale churchyard, dining upon some simple repast of home-made bread and fat bacon, with a dessert of unripe apples, in the drowsy sultriness of summer noon tide. He sat for some few minutes silently thinking of that departed time. The memory of it seemed almost like a sharp physical pain, now that he knew that some great sorrow, some bitter woman’s trial, had come to his cousin. A story about her—a long story! What story should gossiping tongues have to tell of any woman, except a history of suffering and wrong?

He did not press the postmaster to tell him anything further: but he said presently, in an altered voice—a voice that had lost something of its power and ringing vibration,—

“I can get to see this Mrs. Burfield, I suppose?”

“Yes, sir; I make no doubt you can. She is a very genteel person, is Mrs. Burfield, which she have known better days, and finds herself often a little drove like with her lodgers. Her house is Number 2, sir, in the Terrace, Trafalgar Square, fronting sideways, and rather slantin’ like, to the sea. You can see it, sir, from where you stand.”

Following the direction of the postmaster’s extended forefinger, Francis Tredethlyn did see a row of unfinished-looking houses, with the inevitable seaside bow-windows, staring out on a patch of waste ground. Why these houses, and almost all the other houses at Coltonslough, should have slanted away from the sea, obliging their occupants to look out upon the expanse of waters in a sideways and sinister manner, when they might have been built directly facing that single feature of attraction, was a problem far beyond the comprehension of any visitor to the infantine w<sup>re</sup>ering-place.

## CHAPTER XI.

## A VERY OLD STORY.

MRS. BURFIELD was a pale-faced and pinched-looking person, hollow-cheeked and spare of figure, who in these latter days would have inspired a stranger with the idea that she was a rigid disciplinarian of the school founded by Mr. Banting. She looked as if all saccharine and fatty elements had been carefully excluded from her food; and yet, on the other hand, she had none of the muscular energy which might be supposed to result from a carnivorous habit. She was a depressing kind of woman, with thin locks of whity-brown hair dangling upon each side of her thin face, and thin garments hanging limply upon her scanty figure, and a thin voice. There was something in Mrs. Burfield's appearance which called up vague images of drizzly days, and patters, and washing done at home, and a man in the passage clamorous for a water-rate, and all the most unpleasant associations of poverty.

She was a woman who prefaced every sentence she uttered with a sigh. She sighed as she admitted to Mr Tredethlyn that her name was Burfield, as if even that fact were in some manner an affliction. She sighed as she told him, apologetically, that the house was full of lodgers, so she must ask him to step down into the little sitting-room below stairs. And yet, as she subsisted by the letting of lodgings, the crowded state of her house should have been a cause for rejoicing.

Francis had some slight difficulty in conveying his long legs down the narrow little staircase, in which there was a break-neck corner, whence awkward maid-servants were wont to precipitate themselves headlong in company with an avalanche of tea-things; but he managed to find his way down somehow or other, and was ushered into a little faded-looking underground parlour, where all the furniture seemed to have undergone a prolonged course of Banting, and where the evidence of children's habitation was untidily visible in every direction. The children were all at school, however, Mrs. Burfield told Francis with another sigh; though, as she added directly afterwards that they drove her next door to raving madness when they were at home, that fact need scarcely have depressed her.

"I had a governess for them some time back," she said, unconsciously approaching the subject of Mr. Tredethlyn's business with her, "and the young person was very useful to me in many ways; but things have been so dull, and lodgers so uncertain, and so close as to rent and kitchen fire, and such like, that I couldn't afford to engage another young person, if I could have

found anyone as reasonable and as willing as her, which wasn't likely."

Here Mrs. Burfield sighed again, and to her surprise found herself echoed by her visitor.

"It is about that person, the governess, that I have come to inquire," said Francis. "I have reason to believe—I may say that I am almost sure—she is my cousin; very near and very dear to me. Pray tell me all you can about her. I am a rich man, and I am looking for my cousin, who has a better claim than I have to the money that has lately come to me. Pray tell me everything; you shall not find me ungrateful. I will make it well worth your while to help me in this matter."

It might be supposed that Mrs. Burfield, being ground into the very dust by the iron heel of poverty, would brighten a little on hearing this promising speech: but she did nothing of the kind; she only sighed rather more plaintively than usual, and remarked somewhat irrelevantly that her boys were beginning to grow up now, and the boots they knocked out, and the way they wore their things at the knees and elbows, were something awful.

"Tell me all you can about my cousin," urged Mr. Tredethlyn. "Ah, you don't know how long I have been away from England, and how eager I am to find that poor desolate girl. Pray tell me all you know, and quickly."

"It's a long story," said Mrs. Burfield, in the very words used by the grocer—"it's a long story, and goodness knows the rights or the wrongs of it; but if you are her cousin,—and you are, I suppose—"

"I do not think there can be any doubt of it," Francis Tredethlyn answered eagerly; "I do not think there can be any doubt that the person of whom I have heard this morning was my cousin, Susan Tredethlyn."

"The young person to whom *I* allude called herself Susan Turner."

"Yes, yes. It is only natural she should change her name. She left her home because she had been very much persecuted there. She was no doubt afraid of being taken back, and was anxious to hide herself under a false name."

"If I had known that she had come to me under a false name, never would she have slept a night in this house," exclaimed Mrs. Burfield, with something between a sigh and a shudder.

"She was a good and honest girl, under whatever name she came to you," answered Francis Tredethlyn; "but pray tell me the story."

But Mrs. Burfield could not immediately comply with this request; she had to go into the kitchen first, to see that "the girl" was basting some mutton that was being roasted for a

very fastidious "front parlour," who had a rooted objection to baked meats; and then she had to go out into a little area, in which the window looked out, and to hold parley with some person above, who dropped her down divers loaves, and disputed with her as to a certain "twopenny German" which had been had, or had not been had, on the previous Tuesday. At last, however, she was able to seat herself opposite poor Francis, and to begin her story, from the narration of which she seemed to derive a dismal kind of enjoyment.

"It's close upon seven years since my poor dear husband died," Mrs. Burfield began; and for some little time Francis Tredehlyn was afraid that she was going to favour him with a sketch of her own personal history rather than that story which he was so eager to know. "It's close upon seven years, seven years of toil and trouble for me, and up to that time I'd never known what it was to want for anything in a moderate way. He was managing clerk in an insurance office, sir, and was as fine a looking man as you need wish to see; but he was taken—sudden—and I was left alone to provide for four young children. Well, sir, I tried one thing and another, but being genteelly brought up, things seemed to go harder with me than they go with some people; and at last an uncle, on my mother's side, who is very wealthy, and lately retired from the patent chimney-pot business, gave me enough to buy a little furniture and start fresh down here. It's been a hard life, sir, but I shouldn't have so much minded that if it hadn't been for the children. I couldn't bear to see them running wild upon the shore, or playing with vulgar, dirty children on the waste ground; so, a little better than four years ago, I thought I'd try if I couldn't get a person to take care of them, who'd be a kind of governess to them, and would give me a helping hand with the house when my lodgings were full, and wouldn't want above a few pounds a year, just to get herself a new gown once in a way, and so on. Well, sir, I inquired for such a person, but lor'! you might just as well inquire for anything you wanted on Robinson Crusoe's island as at Coltonslough, unless it's queen's-taxes and poor-rates; and you can have plenty of them without asking. So at last someone says to me—I think it was Mr. Sanders at the post-office—"Why don't you advertise in the "Times," Mrs. Burfield? it'll cost you a trifle, but you are sure to get what you want." So the long and the short of it was, I did advertise for a genteel person who would undertake to teach young children, and make herself generally useful, in consideration of a comfortable home and a honorarium of ten pounds per annum. Mr. Sanders advised me to put it in the light of a honorarium, as he said it looked more that way. A young person from the country preferred, I stated in the advertisement; for the things

that lodgers from London bring down with their luggage, and then turn round upon you and object to the bedding, had quite set me against Londoners. Well, sir, I got a good many answers, but the best-written letter was signed Susan Turner. So I wrote to Miss Turner—the address was at a little coffee-house near the Great Western terminus—and I told her that if she liked to come down to Coltonslough for an interview, I would be her expenses one way. Well, she came, and I found her a very pleasant-spoken, respectable-looking young person, and I took to her at first sight to that degree that I allowed her to come to me without reference, she being at variance, as she told me, with her relations in the country.

“She came to you at once, then?”

“Yes, she stayed with me there and then, not caring to go back to London, the strangeness of which frightened her, she said; and she had no luggage, except a little bit of a carpet-bag, full of things, which she sent for next day; and then by-and-by the truth came out, that she’d run away from home. But she had a couple of sovereigns, and she went out and bought herself a few more things, and made herself as neat and comfortable as she could. She didn’t make much secret of how she’d left her home, poor girl. Her father had wanted her to marry against her own wishes, she said, and, in her fear of him, she had **run away.**”

“Poor girl! poor girl!”

“Well, sir,” sighed Mrs. Burfield, “we got on very comfortable for some months. I never met a young person more kind or more willing. The children took to her as if she’d been their own sister, and she was altogether the steadiest, most industrious young person. Things had gone pretty comfortable with me that season; and in the autumn, quite late, going on for November, when people don’t expect to see a single lodger in all Coltonslough, what should I hear, one afternoon, but the wheels of a fly, and a tremendous double knock at my door; and who should I see when I opened it, but a tall, handsome-looking gentleman, who walked straight into my parlour, and took the rooms off-hand, and without so much as inquiring what the terms would be, which, considering the haggling and beating down I’d been accustomed to in the very best part of the season, seemed almost like a dream.”

Mrs. Burfield had warmed with her subject, and had refrained for some time from the relief of a sigh; but she paused now to indulge herself in a very heavy one, and then, after a general disquisition upon the sorrows of a lodging-house keeper, went on,—

“He really was one of the handsomest, easiest-spoken gentlemen I ever met with, and he seemed to take away one’s breath almost; he had such a dashing kind of way with him that, if you’d have shut your eyes, you’d almost have fancied him on

horseback, galloping away for dear life. He seemed all upon the prance, as it were, if I may use the observation. ‘Now I dare say you’ll want references,’ he said, ‘and if so I can’t give you any without putting myself to more trouble than I care about. But you can have some rent in advance if that’ll do; and I’ve no end of luggage, if that’ll do.’ And then he flung himself into one of the arm-chairs, and burst out laughing when it creaked and groaned, as it were, under him; for lodgers have no more feeling for an unprotected female’s furniture than if they was so many Ojibbeway Indians—and I can’t deny that the parlour chairs were uncertain. But I didn’t mind the strange gentleman making game of them, somehow, for he had such a pleasant way with him, and showed his white teeth, and looked so handsome, that he seemed quite to brighten up the place.

“‘Well,’ he said presently, ‘can you guess why I came to Coltonslough in the month of November?’ And of course I told him no, I couldn’t, not having the pleasure of being acquainted with him. Upon which he burst out laughing, again. ‘I came here,’ he said, ‘because I was told Coltonslough was about the dullest place upon the surface of the earth; and I mean to stay here till after Christmas. So you may tell the man outside to bring in my luggage, and look sharp about it.’ Upon which the flyman brought in a couple of big portmanteaus, and a gun-case, and a hat-box, and two of the heaviest trunks that ever came into my passage. ‘Books, ma’am, books, every one of them, and all as heavy as lead,’ said the young gentleman, as the corners of the boxes went scratching and bumping upon the paper,—and the way lodgers’ boxes do scratch and bump an unprotected female’s paper is something awful. But for all that I wasn’t sorry to see plenty of luggage, though the books might have been brickbats neatly packed in hay, as has been known to happen in this very terrace. ‘Well, ma’am,’ says the gentleman, when his luggage had all been brought in and the flyman paid, ‘now I can settle down comfortably. Do I look as if I’d been plucked, do you think, ma’am?’ he asked, looking at me very hard, and sticking his hands deep down in his pockets, which was one of those ways of his that I venture to call prancing. I didn’t quite catch his meaning, but I thought he alluded to something unpleasant; so I said, ‘No, indeed, I should think not.’ ‘But I have, ma’am,’ he answered, looking at me in a measuring sort of way, as if I’d been a five-barred gate, and he was just going to fly clean over me; and that measuring look of his was another of his galloping ways. ‘But I have been plucked, ma’am,’ he said, ‘as clean as any fowl that they ever send you home from the poultorer’s. I’m a featherless biped, ma’am. So I’ve come down to Coltonslough, being,

as I understand, the dullest hole upon the earth's crust, and I mean to go in a perisher.' A 'perisher' was his expression. 'And I mean to read like old boots; so you may let your servant light me a fire, ma'am, and get me some chops; for I suppose I must resign myself to an existence sustained upon chops so long as I'm at Coltonslough.'

Once more Mrs. Burfield stopped to take breath. Francis Tredethlyn listened in silence, with a moody frown upon his face. Already he hated this man, of whose share in his cousin's history he was yet ignorant. He felt as we feel sometimes at a play, when we see the villain first appear upon the stage, and know he is a villain, yet do not know what his special crime is to be.

"Well, sir, of all the pleasant lodgers that ever darkened a widow's door, the plucked young gentleman was the pleasantest. He got up early, and went to his books and papers as soon as he was dressed, and had chops and strong green tea for breakfast; and he sat at his books all day, till it was too dark for him to sit any longer, and then he went and strolled up and down the Esplanade, smoking for an hour or so; and then he came in and had more chops and cold brandy-and-water for his dinner, except when I took the liberty of roasting him a fowl, or getting some other little nicety, just by way of variety; and then, after dinner, he went to his books and papers again, and sat up till very late, reading and writing and drinking strong green tea."

"But my cousin Susan," cried Francis. He was getting impatient under this minute description of the lodger's habits. "What has all this to do with my cousin?"

"I'm coming to that," Mrs. Burfield answered, with a sigh that was more profound than usual. "You see, sir, it happened at this time, being the end of the season, and Coltonslough as empty as it could be; it happened that we were without a servant; so myself and Susan Turner took it in turns to wait upon the young gentleman. Not that I ever asked her to do anything that you can call menial; but she'd take him up his tea, and clear away his dinner things, and light his candles for him, and such like; and knowing her to be a respectable young woman, I didn't keep that sharp watch over her that some folks might have done. If she stopped ten minutes or so in his room, talking to him, I usen't to think anything about it—you can hear almost every sourd in these houses, and it was quite pleasant to hear her soft voice and his laugh ringing out every now and then. He wasn't the sort of gentleman you could suspect of any harm, he had such a happy kind of way with him, as if he was good friends with himself and all the world. He lent Susan books—books of poetry, with all sorts of pencil-writing upon the edges of them;

and I used sometimes to fancy Susan cared more for the pencil-writing than she did for the poetry itself; she'd sit and pore over it so when the children were gone to bed and we were alone in this room. Sometimes the plucked young gentleman would come down here of an evening to fetch himself another candle, or to tell us that he'd let his fire out, or something of that kind; for he wasn't a bit proud; and then, instead of going back directly, he'd sit down and make himself as much at home as if he had lived among us all his life; and Oh, dear me, sir, how he would talk!—all about books and poetry, and the foreign places he'd seen, and plays, and music, and writers, and actors, and singers. He seemed to know everything in the world. So, you see, one way and another, he saw a good deal of Susan; for I found out afterwards from the children that when he went out in the dusk to smoke his cigar he generally contrived to meet Susan, and then he'd walk with her and the children till it was time for them to go indoors. She was a good girl, and she wasn't the girl to throw herself in his way. If they were much together, it was because he followed her. I might have known the meaning of his sitting in this room for hours together of a night; but he had such a natural way of doing everything that it threw one off one's guard, somehow."

"The scoundrel!" muttered Francis Tredehlyn, between his clenched teeth. "But you haven't told me his name. I want to know his name."

"He'd been with us more than a fortnight before ever I asked him what his name was, and then somehow or other the question came up, and he said his name was Lesley—Robert Lesley; but somehow, looking back upon it afterwards, it seemed to me as if he hesitated a little before he said the name. Well, things went on as comfortable as possible for more than two months, and then he went away, taking all his luggage with him, and paying me very liberal for everything he'd had, besides half-a-crown apiece to the children, which at that time of year came very welcome; and of course I took it from them immediately to go towards their new boots. He went away; and as I thought, somehow, he'd had a kind of a liking for Susan, and Susan for him, I half expected the poor girl would fret a little when he was gone; but she didn't, and looking at her sometimes as she sat at work opposite to me, I used to fancy there was a kind of happy smile like upon her face. She'd been with me six months by this time, and I paid her the little trifle that was due; and what did she do next day but go out and spend ever so much in toys and such-like for the children, which, as I told her, was very wrong, considering how badly off she was for clothes. But she made no answer, except

to look at me with the same smile I'd seen so often on her face since Mr. Lesley had gone."

"Poor girl—poor, helpless, innocent girl!"

The dark frown melted into a softer expression as Francis Tredethlyn muttered these few broken words. He was no longer thinking of the stranger—the nameless villain of this common story. He was thinking of his cousin Susy's innocent face, with the smile of girlish trustfulness upon it.

"One day, when Mr. Lesley had been gone a little better than three weeks, a letter came for Susan—I'd need to notice it, for it was the first she'd had since she'd been with me. She ran upstairs directly she heard the postman's knock, and took the letter from him with her own hands, and stopped to read it in the passage. She was putting it in her pocket as she came back into this room, and her cheeks were flushed as bright as two red roses; but she didn't say a word about the letter. All that afternoon she seemed in a kind of flutter, and every now and then she would come all over in a tremble, and drop her work in her lap. She was making some pinafores for the boys, and I said to her, 'Susan, what ever is the matter?' but she turned it off somehow, and nothing more was said until after tea, when the children were safe out of the way, and we were sitting alone together. Then I never did see anybody so restless as she was, laying her work down and taking it up again, and fetching a book—one of the books he'd left with her,—and opening and shutting it, and then pretending to read, but all in the same restless way; till at last she came suddenly behind my chair, and flung her arms round my neck, and began to sob fit to break her poor loving heart. And it was ever so long before she could get calm enough to say anything; but at last she cried out, 'Oh, Mrs. Burfield, I'm afraid I'm very ungrateful; you've been so good to me, and we've been so happy together.' And so we had; though I do think, poor tender-hearted dear, she'd gone through as much on account of the taxes as if she'd been the householder instead of me. 'I'm going to leave you, Mrs. Burfield,' she said; 'I'm going to leave you, and the children that love me so dearly. I'm going away to be married to Mr. Lesley. I'm to go by the first train to-morrow morning, and he's to meet me, at the station, and at eleven o'clock we're to be married.'

"You may guess how she took my breath away when she told me this. But I said, 'Oh, my dear, you can't mean to do anything so mad as go alone to meet Mr. Lesley, which is little better than a stranger to you?' 'A stranger!' she cried out, 'my darling Robert a stranger! Oh, if you only knew how noble he is, and how much he is going to give up to marry a poor girl like me!' And then she went on about him as if

he'd been something better than a human creature; and having always found him so much the gentleman myself, and so open-hearted and frank in all his ways, I could scarcely do otherwise than believe her. But still I urged her all I could against trusting him. ‘Don't go, my dear,’ I said; ‘or, if you must go, let me go with you.’ But she blushed very red, and said, ‘Oh, Mrs. Burfield, the marriage is to be a secret, and I promised Robert again and again that I wouldn't say a word about it to you or any living creature. Only you've been so good to me, and I couldn't bear to go away without telling you the whole truth.’ And upon this I begged her still harder not to go away; I told her no good ever came out of secret marriages, and that there was generally something underhand and false at the bottom of them, that brought about all kinds of trouble and suffering afterwards. And I told her how my Burfield married me publicly in St. Pancras’ Church, and would have his two sisters—one in pink and one in blue—besides the Miss Parkinses, his first cousins, who were sweetly dressed in green and salmon, to walk after me to the altar. But it was no more use talking to Susan than if she'd been a stone statue, though she sat herself on the little hassock at my feet, and kept crying one minute and smiling the next, and talking about her darling Robert, and kissing me, till I almost thought her brain was turned. It was no use talking. ‘I love him so dearly,’ she said, ‘and I know how noble and generous he is.’ And that was her only argument; and long before daylight the next morning she went away by the early train; and though my heart seemed bleeding for her, I couldn't kiss her when she said good-bye, and I couldn't go to the station to see her off. ‘No, Susan,’ I said, ‘if you must go, you must, and I've no power to keep you back; but I'll be neither act nor part in your going.’ But I stood at my window to see her go away, and I shall never forget the dark, grizzly morning, with streaks of gray like on one side of the sky, and white sickly-looking stars on the other, and Susan walking across the waste ground all alone, with the rain driving at her, and the wind beating at her, and a bit of a shabby carpet-bag in her hand. It seemed so dreadful to think she was going to be married like that.”

“But she *did* go away?” cried Francis. “She must have come back to you, then; for the letter with the Coltonslough post-mark reached her father less than eighteen months ago.”

“I'm coming to that,” answered Mrs. Burfield. “It's about eighteen months ago that she came back to me, looking, Oh! so changed, so broken down, that I hadn't the heart to ask her any questions. I could see that all had gone wrong, and I could guess pretty well what kind of wrong it was. She never mentioned Mr. Lesley's name; and there was something in her

face that seemed to make me afraid to mention it myself. She wanted to lodge with me, she said, and would pay me for her lodgings. I could see that she wore a wedding-ring on her finger, but she had no other jewellery whatever. She was dressed in black,—black silk that had once been very handsome, but which was rusty and shabby then. The first night she came to me she sat up very late writing, and in the morning she went out with a letter in her hand. She was with me more than two months; but that was the last time I ever saw her write. She used to be fond of reading; but now she never took up a book, though Mr. Lesley had left a good many of his books in the little chiffonier in the parlour, thinking to come back, as he told me. She used to be fond of the children; but now she never noticed them, and after a little while they seemed to shrink away from her, as if she was strange to them somehow. For hours and days together she used to sit in the bow-window, watching the road from the station, as if she expected some one. At dusk she would go out and walk upon the Esplanade, just at the time that he used to walk with his cigar. It was the dull season, and there was no one to notice her. At last, about the middle of May, when the visitors began to come to Colton-slough, she told me one day that she must leave me. I said, ‘Was it on account of the lodgings?’ because she knew I used to raise the rent at that time of year, and I thought that might be the cause of her wanting to go. But she said, ‘Oh! no, no.’ She had only had one purpose in stopping so long, and that was in the hope of seeing some one, or getting an answer to a letter she had written; and now there was no longer any hope of that. So I couldn’t persuade her to stay any longer, do what I would, and she went away. She had friends in London, she told me, who had promised to put her in the way of getting her own living somehow or other. I kissed her this time, willing enough, poor child, and I went with her to the station; and I thought her pale face looked almost like a ghost’s as she waved her hand to me from the carriage window.”

“ You’re a good woman!” cried Mr. Tredethlyn, half crushing Mrs. Burfield’s skinny hands in his strong fingers,—“ you’re a good woman, and you did your best to befriend that poor girl.”

Mrs. Burfield sighed, and wiped her eyes with the corner of a rusty black-silk apron. The world had been very hard for her; but there was a gentle, womanly haven somewhere in her breast, and Susan Tredethlyn had taken shelter there.

“ She’d been gone a little over six weeks, when an old gentleman came one morning, and asked to see a girl called Susan. That’s how he put it. He was very stern looking, and he threw me all in a tremble, somehow, with his ways; but I asked him down here, and then, little by little, he made me tell him pretty

nearly all I've told you. I couldn't keep anything back from him ; he put his questions so fierce and sudden ; and every time I hesitated ever so little, he accused me of prevaricating with him, and trying to deceive him. I could see his eyes glaring at me like coals of fire, and his face turned of a bluish white, so that I was almost frightened he'd drop down in a fit. But when he'd got all the story out of me, he stood up as straight and stern as if he'd been only twenty years old, and said, 'No man of my name ever knew what disgrace was until to-day ; and may the heaviest curse that ever fell upon a woman's head come down upon my shameful daughter !' He stretched up his two hands,—and I shall never forget him as he stood there with his white hair, and the bluish white of his face, and the dreadful glare in his eyes. Then he put on his hat and walked out of the house, taking no more notice of me than if I'd been a stock or a stone. I heard the front door bang to after him ; and I ran upstairs to the parlour window, and saw him walking away towards the station ; and that's the last I saw of him."

"Can you remember upon what day this occurred ?"

"Yes, I can ; for I'd had the parlour lodgers leave me the day before. It was the 29th of June."

The 29th of June ! and on the 30th Oliver Tredethlyn had executed that will which made Francis master of thirty thousand a year. The young man knew now why his uncle had left him a great fortune, and found it still more difficult to feel very grateful to his benefactor.

There was a long pause, during which vengeful thoughts had their full way in the breast of Francis Tredethlyn.

"Can you tell me nothing more of this man," he said presently,—"this scoundrel, who called himself Robert Lesley ?"

Mrs. Burfield only answered by a hopeless shake of her head.

"He left some books, you say. Was there none among them that would give any clue to who or what he was ?"

Again Mrs. Burfield shook her head.

"You're welcome to look at the books," she said ; "there's plenty of pencil-writing in them, but no name or address,—only initials."

She knelt down before a little chiffonier in a corner by the fireplace, and took out a few volumes, some handsomely, some shabbily bound, and placed them before Francis Tredethlyn.

Upon the handsomely-bound books the initials "R. L." appeared in a gilded monogram. Four of the volumes were German translations of some recondite classics ; but there was a fifth upon which Mr. Tredethlyn fastened eagerly. It was a small flat volume, bound in sheepskin, and fastened with a brass lock—a very superior kind of lock. On the cover was written the one word *"Journal."*

"Let me have this book," he said; "I'll give you a hundred pounds for it."

Mrs. Burfield's mouth opened with a spasmodic action, and for once in her life she forgot to sigh.

"A hundred pounds!"

"A hundred—two, if you like. Haven't I told you that I'm a rich man? and you've been kind to my cousin. I'll give you the money as a free gift, for the matter of that; but I must have this book. It's a journal—a book in which a man writes a history of his own life. An officer I knew in Van Diemen's Land used to write such a history by fits and starts. How do I know what this may tell me about my cousin? Let me have it. I know the book isn't yours; but there can be no such thing as honour or faith to be kept with a man like that. Let me have the book."

There was a good deal more said upon the matter; but the end of it was that Francis Tredethlyn went back to London with the sheepskin-covered volume in his pocket; and Mrs. Burfield, retiring to rest after a heavy supper of cold meat and cucumber, dreamt that she had inherited a million of money from one of the Coltonslough tax-collectors.

## CHAPTER XII.

### A MODERN GENTLEMAN'S DIARY.

FRANCIS TREDETHLYN went back to the hotel in Covent Garden with the little sheepskin-covered volume appertaining to the gentleman who called himself Robert Lesley, safely stowed in his pocket. He went straight back to the hotel, ate his simple dinner, drew the candles near him, and then, taking up a poker from the hearth, made short work of the lock under which the stranger had kept his secrets. All thought of those sunny gardens and drawing-rooms at Twickenham, the glancing river, the woody background, faded out of his mind for a time, and gave place to one settled purpose—the discovery of his missing cousin's destroyer.

Yes, her destroyer! He had only been able to read Mrs. Burfield's story in one fashion. The solitary departure in the chill light of a winter's morning, the haste and secrecy, the lonely return long afterwards; these things seemed to the young man to point only to one conclusion;—the simple Cornish girl's faith had been betrayed by the man she had so implicitly trusted.

In the little volume before him Francis Tredethlyn hoped to find some further clue to that sad history. He seemed to take a savage pleasure in punishing the neat brazen lock, which

shattered with a couple of vigorous blows from the handle of the poker.

"I wonder whether, when a man's a villain, he writes *that* down?" thought Mr. Tredethlyn. "I can't fancy a scoundrel putting the truth about himself even on paper; and if the truth isn't here, I can't see how the book will help me. And yet there must be secrets in it, too, or he'd never have had such a lock as this. Mr. Lowther used to throw his journal about anywhere, and I don't think *he* ever did anything that was particularly worth writing down."

The Cornishman began to turn over the volume very slowly, looking at the pages cautiously, almost as if he expected to see some venomous creature crawl out from between the leaves. The first twenty pages of the book were filled with the records of a college life, in which brief memoranda of study were interspersed with boating slang and turf calculations. The name of a certain Rosa, of the King's Head, appeared very often in these earlier pages; and there were little epigrams about Rosa, bespeaking the easy-going morality of a Rochester or a Sedley, rather than the pure sentiments of a Tennyson or a Longfellow. Altogether there was a reckless, swaggering manner about the book, which very well corresponded with Mrs. Burfield's description of the prancing stranger.

But the volume had no interest for Francis Tredethlyn until he came to the twentieth page, where the name of Coltonslough figured for the first time.

"November 8.—The abomination of desolation, and just the place for a fellow that wants to read hard and be delivered from the society of his fellow-creatures! Arrived yesterday afternoon: found civil landlady, stereotyped sea-side accommodation; decrepit easy-chair, slippery horsehair cushions; no window-curtains to speak of, and a great deal of unnecessary drapery festooned about a rickety tent-bedstead; wash-hand-stand one size too large for a doll, and fifty sizes too small for any civilized being; shells and shepherdesses on the mantelpieces, and any amount of blown-glass decanters on the sideboard. Dined on chops, which were fried, soddened in their own grease. Must speak to the landlady to-morrow, and insist on gridiron. The woman who would fry chops would think nothing of human sacrifices. A girl waited upon me, a good deal younger than Rosa, and I think prettier—but we have changed all that, so I didn't take particular notice of her. Read hard till after one, and write this before retiring to my couch,—flock, and lumpy, for I dug my knuckles into the counterpane while examining the apartment.

"November 9.—The girl, who is infinitely superior to Rosa, brought me my breakfast. More chops, not fried, but soddened

in relic of the dark ages entitled Dutch oven, for I inquired; and underdone French rolls. Why, O provincial baker, always underdone? What grudge dost thou bear against thy fellow-man that thou seekest insidiously to undermine his constitution with thy clammy bread-stuffs? Girl, infinitely prettier than Rosa, cleared away breakfast. Very shy, and only answers polite inquiries in monosyllables. Asked if she was relation of woman of house. No, no relation; nursery governess to children. Comes from some remote district in the west of England; evidently objects to be precise as to locality. Heard her go down kitchen stairs with tea-things, and did not hear her reascend them. Conclude that the nursery is somewhere in the cellarage. Read hard all day. Smoke and stroll in the evening. Landlady waited on me at dinner. Dismal change, after monosyllabic girl, recalling Death's-head at Egyptian banquets, but not crowned with flowers. More reading after dinner, brandy-and-water cold, and now to bed. Have ordered mattress to be put over flock. Sleeping on knobby surface all very well now and then, but not for a permanence. Mem: To keep my eye upon Lord Paisley's 'Blazing Tom,' for the Craven meeting.

"November 12.—No diary yesterday or the day before. Read with German crib: wonderful fellows those Germans for first-class translations of classic fogies. Wrote to H. C. to put a pony on 'Blazing Tom.' Walked on the Esplanade in the afternoon, and made the acquaintance of monosyllabic Cornish girl, infinitely prettier than Rosa. Yes, I succeeded in breaking the ice, with considerable trouble; for I never did see anything feminine so shy and frightened as this brown-eyed Cornish girl. 'Her eye's dark charm,' &c. Well, there is something of the gazelle in her eyes, something shrinking and fawn-like. I could fancy the white doe of what's-its-name looking as she looked at me yesterday.

"I went out for my smoke and stroll rather earlier than I had intended. I saw the Cornish girl and three uncouth children in rusty leather boots wending their way across the piece of waste ground which forms the delicious prospect before my window. A nice, cool, gray afternoon, with a low yellow streak on the western horizon; a gray sea, melting into a gray sky, with only just that one golden streak glimmering along the edge of the waters; the sort of afternoon that reminds one of Tennyson's poetry. So I lighted my cigar, and went out for a stroll. Perhaps I followed the monosyllabic girl. What do I know? as that amiable French nuisance, who is perpetually quoted in newspaper leaders, remarked. Enough that I went, found the Cornish girl, very shabbily dressed, but unutterably pretty, strolling listlessly up and down the paved walk beside the sea. They call it the sea; but, Oh for the roaring breakers!

of the Atlantic, or the long hoarse roar of the waves as the German Ocean surges on broad yellow sands yonder, far away in the North !

" And so, having lighted my cigar, I strolled up and down the Esplanade. Of course I began to talk to the children. If children have any use in this world—which I have been frequently inclined to doubt—surely it must be in this matter of serving as a means of introduction to pretty nursemaids. The children and I were intimate in no time; the presuming little imps became, of course, obnoxiously familiar; and, like all go-betweens, were very difficult to shake off when done with. But I got the Cornish girl to talk at last. She is not stupid, only shy; and she told me a good deal, in a pretty, simple, girlish way, about her native county, always keeping clear of all precise allusion to locality, by the bye. She is very pretty,—I had almost written lovely, but that adjective can only be applied to a high-bred beauty. She is extremely pretty, and that white doe of Rhylston (isn't it?) look in her eyes haunted me all last night while I was reading. Yes, it was very pleasant, that stroll upon the Esplanade. I threw away my first cigar, and forgot to light another, though she would have allowed me to smoke, I dare say. It was very pleasant, that cool gray sea, and the yellow streak fading in the west, and the flat gray shore, and the generally Tennysonian aspect of everything. It was very much better than the King's Arms, and a lot of fellows drinking no end of Bass, and chaffing Rosa. I don't suppose this Cornish girl knows what chaff means. I almost shudder when I think of Rosa, with her big, round, black eyes, and the sticky little curls upon her forehead, and the tartan neck-ribbons, and great yellow earrings. And Oxonians have married Rosas before my time, and have deservedly gone to the dogs thereupon. But fifty thousand is your figure, my dear Robert,—fifty thousand, well sounded, and no separate-use-and-maintenance humbug either. Something in the commercial-widow line, I suppose you will have to put up with, my poor Bob; but no greedy old parent to interfere with the disposal of the money. The widow, or the orphan, if a fifty thousand pounder, is the sort of article for you, dear child.

" November 13.—She brought me my breakfast this morning —(what, is she *she* already? Alas, poor Rosa!)—and I got her to pour out my tea. I couldn't detain her long: she was so *very* busy, she said, and seemed painfully anxious to get away. I made her talk a little. She has a nice low voice,—'an excellent thing,' &c.! Now Rosa had a vixenish way of speaking, that always jarred upon me, even when I was deepest down that pit into which the fair barmaid's admirers cast themselves. She—the Cornish girl—is what people call a genteel young person,

with white hands and a slim waist, and a nice way of doing her hair, and putting on her collars and cuffs. Her name is Susan Turner, by the bye; and the children call her Susy. Could anything sound more pastoral? Susy. The name of Rosa was always so painfully suggestive of nigger melodies. Another cool gray afternoon, and another low yellow line across the sky; so I went out for my smoke at the same time as yesterday. She was on the Esplanade with the children. She instructs them in arithmetic, writing, and elementary smatterings of history, geography, and grammar, after dinner, and then brings them out for a walk till tea-time, after which they 'retire to rest,' as the novelists have it, not without considerable rebellious scuffling in the passage and on the stairs. That is the order of the day. In the morning, I suspect, she is housemaid, parlour-maid, needlewoman, or anything else that my landlady's necessities oblige her to be. But she is always equally neat and pretty; and if she were only provided with that trifling little matter of fifty thousand or so in the elegant simplicity of the three per cents, I should be decidedly inclined to fall in love with her. Does one ever fall in love with a fifty-thousand pounder, by the bye? I rather think not. She—Susy—was not quite so shy this afternoon, and we talked a good deal. I offered to lend her some books. I offered to lend Rosa books once, when I was in the lowest depths of spooneyism, and was unhappy about her grammar—those dreadful superfluous 'whiches,' and intolerable 'as hows'!—but Rosa rejected my literature, as dry rubbish that gave her the horrors. I had lent her the 'Bride of Lammermoor.' My little Susy won't turn up that innocent nose of hers at any sentimental story, I'll be bound. I've found an odd volume of Byron, containing 'Parisina,' and the 'Prisoner of Chillon,' and a lot of the 'To Thirza' business.

"N.B.—I find that I've called her my little Susy! Pretty well, as I've been only a week in the place. Am I going down into another pit, I wonder—a deeper abyss than that into which Rosa casts her victims? Poor, pretty, fawn-eyed little darling! Take care of yourself, my dear Robert. Poor, friendless Susy! She couldn't well be *worse off* under any circumstances than she is in this place, that's one blessing: the drudge of a mistress who is herself a slave in the bondage of poverty. I went down to the kitchen yesterday to get a fresh supply of coals—these people are ready to fall down and worship me because I'm not proud, as they put it; but there are numerous orders of pride, I think,—and I saw their dinner. Such a poor bone of mutton! Poor little Susy! how she would open her eyes at sight of the Richmond and Greenwich banquets that I have seen given to persons as inferior to herself as—Hyperion to the other person. What a frightful hindrance to original composition is that abu-

minable habit of hackneyed quotation!—the great newspaper-mill going round three-hundred-and-thirteen times a year, and only one little limited stock of quotations for all the leader-writers.

“ November 16.—Sunday, and a wet day : saw Susan start for church in the morning with prayer-books and children. Strolled out with umbrella a little after twelve ; found church ; unpleasant new building, smelling of damp stucco, and looking like an edifice of soddened brown paper ; waited in the porch, patient as that young idiot in Arthur Pendennis’s poem, until my lady came out, and conducted her home in triumph under my umbrella, while the awkward squad of children brought up the rear under cover of the maternal gingham. She was obliged to take my arm ; and as the walk from the church is rather a long one, we got alarmingly intimate—when I say alarmingly intimate, I mean that she has taken to blushing when I speak to her. That’s the worst of these fawn-like girls ; they will blush ! And when they’re pretty, the blushes are so bewitching. And when they don’t happen to have fifty thousand or so, what is a fellow to do ? Take to his heels, replies the stern moralist, who has sown his own wild oats twenty years ago, and is envious of the young scatterers of to-day. I came to Coltonslough to read ; and come what may, I shall stay there till it’s time to go back to St. B. In the meantime, Susan is a brown-eyed angel—an angel who leads the life of a low-bred drudge, and for whom any possible change of circumstances must be a change for the better.

“ Of course I questioned her about the sermon as we walked home. Take an interest in sermons, and women will believe in you, though you were the veriest scoundrel that ever admired Voltaire and considered the ‘ Pucelle ’ his *chef-d’œuvre*. What a little Puritan she is ! She has been to church twice every Sunday ever since she can remember, she told me, and to Sunday-school, and to all kinds of examinations and cross-examinations in the vicar’s parlour. I don’t suppose she would have floundered as I did, and come to grief over some of the questions those old fogies at Oxford asked me about Biblical history. She knows all about Saul, and David, and Jonathan, and those everlasting wars with the Philistines, I dare say. She is very pretty, lovely—yes, lovely, though *not* high-bred. I sometimes fancy, though, that she must have decent blood in her veins. I never saw a prettier little hand upon my arm than that which rested there to-day, as I brought her home from church. If I were—something utterly different from what I am, I would get my degree, go in for a country curacy, and little Susy should be my wife. But *noblesse oblige* : which very elastic aphorism means, in my case, that I must marry a rich

woman, and hold my own in my native county whenever the reigning potentate is polite enough to retire to the dusky shades whither all earthly sovereigns must go.

"Poor little Susan! pretty little Susan! When I am a county magnate, laying down the law at the head of my table in the great dining-room at the hall, shall I look back and think of these days, and smile at myself, remembering that I could be so foolish as to go out on a wet Sunday to escort a little nursemaid along a damp clay road?"

"Read hard all the afternoon: dined on an elderly fowl flavoured with Dutch oven—a bird that must have known Coltonslough when the first bow-windowed house was a damp brickwork skeleton, grim and open to the howling of the winds. Read for some time after dinner, and let my fire out. Went downstairs to hunt up matches and firewood, and found my landlady and Susan sifting opposite to each other at a little table with one tallow-candle, reading pious compositions of an evangelical tendency. They both seemed glad to see me; so I stopped and talked to them. Susan had read the 'Prisoner of Chillon'; she read it last night, and cried over it 'fearful,' my landlady informed me; so we were able to talk about the poem, and I read two or three of the fugitive pieces aloud. I used to be rather great at the debating-club at O., and I gave them the 'Thyrsas' and 'Day of my Destinys' very strong. I could see the tears shining in Susan's eyes before I'd finished. I used to recite poetry to Rosa, sometimes, when I'd been taking too much Bass, and we stood in the moonlit porch at the King's Arms, with the river, and the willows, and the towing-path all of a shimmer in the silvery light; but one is apt to get tired of reciting sentimental poetry to a young person who cries, 'Lor', how funny!' at the close of some passionate verse. I remember thundering out that grand anathema of Tom Moore's against the Prince Regent, 'Go, deceiver, go!' and my Rosa asked me naïvely what the gentleman had done that the other gentleman should use such bad language to him. No, Rosa, your strong point was not intellect. In the matter of sticky curls and large black eyes you are unsurpassed, but the sentimental element in your nature may be represented by zero."

"November 30th.—More blanks in my journal. I said we were growing alarmingly intimate; such an intimacy is alarming to a fellow who came to Coltonslough bent on devoting himself to Aristotle and Aristophanes, Æschylus and Euripides, and all that sort of people. Have been reading 'The Clouds' all this morning, but found a strange undercurrent of Susan Turner pervading that classic satire; and I mean to go in and win this time: those fellows at St. Boniface sha'n't be able to laugh at my discomfiture a second time. Why were women

created for the trouble and confusion of the superior sex? I thought I should be so safe at Coltonslough, remote from Rosa, the Delilah of my youth; and lo! here is another Delilah, a thousand times more dangerous—a shy, brown-eyed Omphale, for whose sake any intellectual Hercules on this earth would meekly hold the distaff. She is so pretty; and all those modest, shrinking ways have such an unspeakable fascination after a long course of Rosa's sharp repartees, all redolent of the bar and the beer-engines. I can never dissociate Rosa from the smell of malt liquors and ardent spirits, with just a faint suspicion of lemons and stale pork-pie. But there must be something extraordinary about *this* girl, for her vulgar surroundings do not seem to vulgarize her. I don't mean that she is one of nature's duchesses, or any humbug of that sort. I have no belief in nature's nobility, and to my mind a duchess is a person who has been cradled in Belgravia, whose long-clothes were flounced with *point d'Alençon*, and to whom the wrong side of Temple Bar would be as strange as the centre of Africa. I should by no means care to see my little Susy in a London drawing-room; but I can fancy her domiciled in some rustic cottage in the lake district, a patient Wordsworthian little handmaiden, waiting upon and worshipping her husband, and getting him cosy breakfasts, with silvery trout broiled to perfection, and mushrooms newly-gathered from the neighbouring plains. If I were only an embryo curate, with neither expectations nor ambitious desires, I scarcely think that I could find a better wife than this simple gazelle-eyed maiden; but—Oh, that terrible monosyllable! The history of all the world seems made up of buts and ifs.

"My afternoon stroll upon the Esplanade has grown into an established thing. Sixpence judiciously bestowed upon the children despatches those young abominations scurrying over the waste ground to an emporium which they call 'the shop,' whence they return after an interval, embrowned and sticky with the traces of ginger-bread and barley-sugar. In the meanwhile Susan and I are alone on that dreary Esplanade. What is it Byron says about youth, and solitude, and the sea? Well, that sort of thing is rather a dangerous combination; and I begin to think that if I want to redeem my character at St. B., I shall be obliged to take myself and my books away from Coltonslough. 'Breathes there the wretch with soul so dead,' who could sit in that dingy parlour, coaching himself in the classics, while one of the prettiest girls in all the British dominions is walking up and down the Esplanade opposite his window, and thinking of him? Yes, she thinks of me, and expects me, when that yellow streak begins to glimmer in the west. I have seen her head turned towards my window; and then I pitch

my friend Sophocles into the remotest corner, and go out for my afternoon stroll.

"December 10.—Yes, the dismal confession must be written, or the account between R. L. and self closed for ever. I am in love—seriously, desperately, unreasonably in love—with a young person whose social status is something between that of a parlour-maid and a nursery-governess. Could she be worse off than she is now? Could any turn in the wheel of fortune leave her in a lower place than that she now occupies? Scarcely! I don't believe in those dismal histories which the Minerva Press was wont to disseminate. Susan is just the sort of girl to fall on her feet. Those shy, sensitive creatures always know how to take care of themselves, and often do remarkably well in life. It's your dashing, high-spirited, strong-minded girl who goes to the bad. Goodness knows I'm not a bad-hearted fellow. I can't look at such a girl as Susan without worrying myself about her future career. There's scarcely any sacrifice I wouldn't make—short of the sacrifice of my own prospects—in order to insure her welfare. Yes, the little stranger, let into my dwelling unawares, has strung his bow and twanged his arrow home to my heart. I am really in love this time. I used to feel savage with those St. B. fellows when they talked nonsense to Rosa: but I think I should annihilate the man who so much as looked at this girl. Yes; I am prepared to make any sacrifice—short of the destruction of my own prospects. Your really rich man, or your penniless beggar, can afford to make a fool of himself; but I stand just in that middle distance between the golden lands of plenty and the sterile plains of poverty, in which a man must needs be peculiarly circumspect.

"17th.—I have broken the ice at last. What a little Puritan she is! And yet I know that she loves me, with the regular Haidee or Zuleika sort of devotion: would like to kneel at my feet and offer me tiresome flowers, when I was absorbed in the classic foggies, and all that sort of thing. A long interview on the Esplanade this afternoon. I beat the ground with the greatest discretion; for it would have been the easiest thing in the world to frighten her. It must be a marriage—a *bona fide* marriage, secret, of course. She won't object to that. But upon the other point I can see she would be inflexible. Those quiet people are always obstinate. Ay di me, my pretty Susy, I fear that you and I must say Good-bye. And I am really over head and ears in that dismal pit. I am most absurdly fond of her; that's the worst of it. Yes, we must say Good-bye. The catechisms in the rector's parlour and the Sunday-school have done their work, and Susan Turner will be a drudge all her life rather than surrender those ridicu-

lous prejudices which it is the fashion to implant in the minds of rustic youth. *Addio, my pretty Susan.* I cannot imagine anything more delightful than our quiet walks in the cold gray twilight; I cannot conceive any eyes—out of a Murillo—so beautiful as those brown orbs of yours—orbs is the proper phrase, I think, when a fellow is sentimental;—but the price demanded is too heavy. One may buy gold in too dear a market; and ten years hence, with blighted prospects, and half-a-dozen children, I might grow tired of my white doe of what's-its-name, and fancy a blue-eyed Greuze—how wonderful that man was in his manipulations of violet-hued pupils swimming in enamelled whiteness!—instead of my Murillo.

"20th.—I began to pack my books the day before yesterday, and yet I linger. 'Tell me, my heart, if this be love!' Not much doubt about it, I fear. But only a day or two more, and then—and then good-bye, pretty puritanical Susan, with your Sunday-school morality, and all that innate obstinacy peculiar to quiet women. I shall have forgotten her in six weeks, I dare say. But then that consolatory idea of the future oblivion won't lessen the present anguish of parting. We may forget all about a gigantic triple-pronged carious tooth when we turn our back upon the dentist's torture-chamber, but the pang of extraction is none the less. I shall forget her, and some other eyes will haunt me in my sleep; but there must be a long blank interval of weariness before the Lethean waters can wash away that artless face. I have plumbed her simple mind to its uttermost depths, and have found nothing like deception or pretence. So we must part. I to go forth and do my best at opening the great oyster; she to remain here as my landlady's drudge and companion. Poor little thing! I hope she'll miss me when I go. I shouldn't like to think of her enjoying a flirtation with some new lodger—a city clerk, who would wear ready-made clothes bought somewhere in Shoreditch, and smoke cheap Manillas. No, I shouldn't like to fancy her happy when I am gone. It wouldn't have been pleasant to the Corsair to imagine Medora flirting with mercantile mariners in his absence.

"21st.—I have packed all my books, except a few German crib-s. Perhaps it was as well, for my studies had grown very desultory. How can a fellow read hard when there is a pretty girl in the case, and he has been so profound an idiot as to fall in love with her? But 'it is written,' as the followers of the prophet observe, and I must go. I have told Susan. We had a very affecting interview yesterday. How the poor little girl cried! And I hate to see a woman cry; it's so excruciating to the feelings of a good-hearted fellow; and the prettiest woman's nose is apt to get just a *leetle* red when 'the tears come trick-

ling down, down, down.' O Susan, that I should quote that familiar ballad of Lord Lovell when I write of your sorrow! But I suppose there is something of the *persifleur* in my nature, for I don't often find myself very earnest about anything. And so we walked up and down the Esplanade; she crying, and I talking. I flatter myself I talked rather well. There was just that dash of excitement about the business which makes a fellow talk well. But my eloquence was all of no avail; Alfred de Musset, Byron, George Sand, Rousseau, and Thomas Moore, all combined, cannot prevail against the tenets of the Sunday-school; and so we are to part, 'in silence and tears, half broken-hearted, to sever,' &c., unless I were prepared to sacrifice my prospects and put the fatal noose about my neck.

"Bah! it would be too absurd, too utterly preposterous. Such things have been, and have always resulted in pretty much the same way. Your poet Shelley gets expelled from the University because he can't keep his convictions to himself, marries a simple rustic maiden, grows tired of her, and falls in love with someone else, whereon rustic maiden drowns herself, whence unspeakable *esclandre* and confusion.

"January 2nd.—No, the thing cannot be done; the sacrifice would be too great. The days of the Minerva Press are past. The yellow post-chaise, the lonely country inn, the college friend who is introduced in a surplice, and acts as clergyman—alas! are not these exploded with the dark ages? Were there ever any such marriages, I wonder? or were they only figments of the romancer's brain? At any rate, anything of that kind must be impossible nowadays. And then a man must be a consummate scoundrel who could devise such a plot. I don't pretend to the Sunday-school species of morality; but *nemo repente fuit turpissimus*, as Juvenal has it. I am not so bad as that.

"5th.—She is very unhappy; and how hard it seems to leave her to this drudgery and desolation—Coltonslough, and my landlady, and my landlady's children, all the year round! And she is just the 'creature not too bright or good,' &c.; the very woman of all others for a cottage in the lake districts, or a Devonshire fishing-village, or any pretty out-of-the-way haven, where a man might take his rest. And yet I must leave her here, baffled entirely by the Sunday-school precepts with which her shallow mind has been imbued. I have no time to play the Lovelace, and I don't want such a victory as his. I have had tiresome letters from home. They will expect me to get my degree; and I am free to confess that my reading since I have been at Coltonslough has been the merest moonshine. Decidedly I must leave this place by to-night's express. 'Better to die by sudden shock,' &c.: and as for Susan, it is only a natural chap.

ter in such a girl's history. She will break her heart, and then marry a small tradesman, who will give her a Paisley shawl and a black-silk gown to wear on Sundays.

"6th. Another day, and I am still here. I was awake all last night, thinking of all manner of possibilities, or perhaps impossibilities. The yellow post-chaise and the college friend in a surplice are obsolete absurdities; but how about a marriage before the Registrar? Is there anything so very impossible in a marriage before the Registrar, which shall not be, say, *too* binding? Why not a marriage before the Registrar, between eight and twelve in the forenoon, with open doors, in the presence of two witnesses, &c.? You walk into an office, very much like any other office, and you see an official very much like any other official, and there is a trifling formula, and a little signing and countersigning, and so on, and the business is done. But even about this there would be a good deal of trouble, and the college friend would still be necessary, though not in a surplice—and the witnesses—and the office. *Is* the game worth the candle? Am I really so desperately in love? And then, again, supposing the game worth the cost of illumination, these sort of games are so apt to be dangerous; and awkward stories crop up against one in after-life; with perhaps Chancery suits, and so forth. No, it is too much trouble. It will be better for Susan and I to shake hands, like sensible people, and say Good-bye.

"7th.—A very long talk with Susan. I told her that we must part; our roads in life lying separate, and so on. Poor child! her grief was something very terrible. We had wandered out to some lonely ground beyond the Esplanade, leaving those abominable children to disport themselves as they pleased. We sat down upon a little bank at the edge of a great ploughed field, with the grey sea before us. The poor child sobbed as if her heart would have broken. I am no deliberate Lovelace, but I suppose I have in this instance pursued the prey with something of a Mexican trapper's intensity. I never meant to be in earnest; but have been drifted, as it were, by the chances of the situation; and people who let lodgings at dull watering-places really should not employ such pretty parlour-maids. Poor, tender-hearted little Susy! I never thought she could have grown so fond of me, or that a little sentimental spouting, and a few pretty speeches, could have gone so far. I should have been a callous wretch if I had not been touched by her grief; and I was inexpressibly touched; so much so that I flung all good resolutions to swell the general heap of paving material for the halls of Pluto, and told my Susy that there was an alternative for this miserable parting if she would—trust me—and consent to a marriage before the Registrar.

"She will trust me. I explained to her the nature of the

ceremonial I proposed, and how all unnecessary publicity and the ruin of my prospects might be avoided thereby. And then the poor little thing burst out with a whole string of romantic protestations.

"Did she want me to sacrifice my prospects? Oh no, no! Did she want to be acknowledged before the world as my wife? No, a thousand times. She knew very well that she was too ignorant and humbly educated to support such an honour. She only wanted to know herself that she was my wife, my own lawful wife, united to me by the laws of heaven and earth.

"The laws of heaven and earth as administered in a Registrar's office. I have cast prudence to the winds, and am now committed to the step which I only dreamed of as a possibility last night. I have a sort of foreboding that the business will bring me into trouble; but having gone so far now, am I to recede? And then I am really desperately in love with this Cornish girl.

"How is it to be done? These things seem so simple when one contemplates them in a dreamy reverie engendered by tobacco-smoke. It will be rather a complicated business, I fear; and the college friend, that is the grand question. Who is to be the convenient college friend? Perhaps I had better sleep upon it.

"8th.—After a world of serious consideration, I can think of no one but my brother. He's a selfish beggar, who'd scarcely wet the tips of his fingers to save an entire ship's crew from drowning; but he owes me money, and ought to go through fire and water to serve me. At any rate he is not troubled by any scruples or compunctions of the Sunday-school order; and then he's a clever fellow, and on the spot. I'll go up to town to-morrow and sound him about it."

There was no more. The journal ended here; and Francis Tredethlyn sat staring at the last half-page, sorely puzzled as to how he was to read that broken history.

That the lines before him had been written by a heartless profligate he could scarcely doubt, little as he had been accustomed to sit in judgment on his fellow-men. But he was slow to understand the full measure of the writer's depravity. A more subtle mind than his was required to read the hidden meaning of that carelessly-written diary. Francis Tredethlyn only understood that his cousin had fallen into the hands of a selfish worldling, who had been fascinated by her pretty face, but who set his own welfare and his own happiness before all thought of her love or sorrow.

"He meant to marry her," thought the young man; "thank heaven for that. No matter how secret or clandestine the

marriage may have been, it shall be my task to find Susan, and to make that marriage public."

Mr. Tredethlyn went early the next day to Gray's Inn, there to hold a solemn consultation with the chief of that firm which had transacted all Oliver Tredethlyn's legal affairs during a period of some forty years.

To Mr. Kursdale, Francis told all that he had been able to discover of his cousin Susan's history; and to the lawyer's hands he confided the manuscript volume surrendered to him by Mrs. Burfield.

" You'll be able to make more out of it than I can, Mr. Kursdale," he said. " Heaven knows I read it carefully; but I can only understand that the man is a scoundrel, and that it was my cousin's evil fortune to love him. I wonder how it is that a simple innocent country girl always does fall in love with a scoundrel, if he has only got a handsome face and a smooth tongue?"

The next day was Saturday, and Francis Tredethlyn's thoughts were strangely divided between the contemplation of his cousin's unknown wrongs, and the expectation of a day in the sunny gardens and drawing-rooms at the Cedars. Late in the evening there came a letter from Mr. Kursdale, the solicitor,—

*" Yourself and Another.*

" DEAR SIR,—After a very careful perusal of the MS. volume intrusted to me by you yesterday, I regret to say that I can only come to one conclusion respecting the intentions of the writer.

" I believe that it was this person's design to involve Miss Susan Tredethlyn in a fictitious marriage, which should be, in fact, no marriage at all.

" A marriage before the Registrar would have been as entirely valid, if duly performed, as any religious solemnization.

" I conclude, therefore, that the writer of the MS. diary contemplated a sham ceremony, in the presence of some person, falsely representing himself to be the Superintendent Registrar.

" I much fear that your cousin's simplicity would render her likely to be the dupe of any such plot.

" Should you wish to communicate with me further on this subject, I shall be glad to wait upon you at any time you may appoint.

" I am, dear Sir, yours very obediently,

" JAMES KURSDALE."

" A mock marriage!" thought Francis Tredethlyn. " Yes; I understand it all now. There was an insolence in his manner

of writing of my pretty Susy that stung me to the very heart. No honest man ever wrote like that of any woman; no man would write like that of a woman whom he meant to make his wife."

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### CAUGHT IN THE TOILS.

FRANCIS TREDETHLYN spent the bright summer Sunday afternoon and evening at the Cedars. Mr. Hillary generally filled his house with company on the day of rest; and hard-working commercial magnates, and lazy West-end loungers, were alike glad to spend their Sabbath amongst the flower-beds and trellised walks, under the shadow of black spreading cedars, or on the terrace by the river. The merchant's house was only another Star-and-Garter, where the *menu* was always irreproachable, and where one escaped that little bugbear so common to the close of all social entertainments, and known by the vulgar name of "Bill." Mr. Tredethlyn found the house full of strangers, and Miss Hillary very difficult of approach. He was not allowed to feel embarrassed, however; for Julia Desmond always happened to be in his neighbourhood, and he found her society as charming as on the previous occasion. She was so very handsome, and there was really something so bewildering about her dark eyes, and white teeth, and fluent talk upon every possible subject, that the young man—who had never been accustomed to the society of well-educated women—may be forgiven if he admired her. He admired her, but not as he admired Maude Hillary. No thrill of half-fearful rapture stirred his pulses as he stood by Julia's side upon the moonlit terrace, looking down at the rippling water, darkened by the tremulous shadows of the trees; but the faintest flutter of Maude's airy flounces stirred his soul like a burst of music.

But she was only a beautiful, far-away creature, who never could have any part in his destiny. He acknowledged this in a half-despairing way; and then resigned himself to look at her only now and then from a distance, and to behold her always surrounded by those elegant amber-whiskered loungers, whose admiration of her loveliness never made them awkward in her presence; who could approach her without suffering from a sudden determination of blood to the head; who could hover near her without trampling half-a-yard of her lace flounce to destruction under the savage tread of a clumsy foot.

"Those fellows are fit to talk to her," he thought; "they've been brought up to it, I suppose: but I'm better out of her way; for even if she speaks to me, I make a fool of myself somehow, and feel as if I couldn't answer her. I get on better

with Miss Desmond ; she's so kind, and she doesn't seem to mind my being awkward and stupid."

Yes, Miss Desmond was very kind to the simple-hearted Cornishman. So kind is Madame Arachne to a big blundering blue-bottle fly that hovers ignorantly about the net she has spread for him. Julia had angled very patiently for the last two years in the great matrimonial fisheries, and had brought several fish to land, only to lose her hook and leave them to gasp and perish on the bank when she discovered their quality. But now, for the first time, she knew she had a prey worthy her skill and patience. She had taken good care to ascertain that Francis Tredethlyn's thirty thousand a year was no mere figment of a gossip's brain, and she set herself deliberately to work to win this prize so newly offered for competition in the matrimonial market. Mr. Hillary interested himself in the young man's fortunes, and gave him some advice about the management of some of his Uncle Oliver's numerous investments. This, of course, necessitated interviews at the merchant's offices in Moorgate Street; and no interview ever came to a close until Francis had received hospitable Mr. Hillary's invitation to "run down" to Twickenham.

The young man seemed always running down to the Cedars. He slept there sometimes, in a pretty chintz-curtained chamber, all rosebuds and maplewood, and from whose jasmine-festooned windows he looked out upon the river—the perpetual river, now shimmering in the moonlight, now twinkling and glancing in the sunshine, but always "a thing of beauty and a joy" for the people who dwell upon its banks.

Yes, he was always riding down to the Cedars. He had departed very little from his simple habits ; but he had bought a couple of horses at Tattersall's—such horses as a man who has been used to ride across wild moorland districts without saddle or stirrups from his earliest boyhood knows how to choose. He kept the horses at livery near his hotel, and he hired a smart young groom to attend to them, and even to ride behind him on occasions.

Miss Hillary grew accustomed to the young man's presence, and greeted him kindly when he came ; but then she had so many friends, such enthusiastic female adorers in crisp muslins, who found the millionaire's daughter the dearest darling in the world, and were always eager to pour some new confidence into her willing ears. She had so many friends, so many admirers, that Francis Tredethlyn always found her more or less difficult of approach. And in the meanwhile there was Miss Desmond perpetually smiling upon him, and talking to him, and listening to him.

So things went on very pleasantly for Mr. Tredethlyn, until

one day his eyes were very suddenly opened to a fact that well-nigh overpowered him. He was lounging on the terrace one sunny afternoon, and, for a wonder, Julia Desmond was not by his side. She had been summoned into the midst of a conclave of pretty girls holding solemn discussion with Maude Hillary on the lawn. Francis was looking down at the water, as it was his habit to do, and thinking. He was leaning against the balustrade of the terrace, all amongst the foliage which had been so bright when he had first come to the Cedars, but which was brown and withered now: he was watching the dead leaves slowly drifting in the wind, and dropping one by one into the water; and he was thinking of his cousin Susan. Nothing had yet come of his search for her. Perhaps he had left the matter too much in the hands of his lawyers, trusting to their legal acumen for the unravelment of the tangled skein. It may be that he had been a little too much at the Cedars, absorbed in the delights of a new existence. This afternoon, watching the drifting leaves upon the river, the gold and crimson tints of autumn on the woodland and on the hill-side, Francis Tredethlyn remembered how the time had slipped by him, and how little nearer he was to the discovery of Susan Tredethlyn's fate than when he had listened to Martha's story in the dreary Cornish grange, and had sworn to go to the end of the world in search of his cousin. There was some feeling of remorse in his mind as he thought of the past three months, the idle days in that luxurious river-side retreat, the billiard-playing and cigar-smoking, the pleasant rides to and fro in the dewy evenings, with genial gentlemanlike companions, who thought him a good fellow, and very rarely laughed at his ignorant simplicity.

He was roused from his reverie now by one of these young men, Mr. Montagu Somerset, of the War-Office, the scion of a noble house, the presumptive heir to nothing a-year, and one of the most hopelessly devoted of Maude Hillary's adorers.

"Why, Tredethlyn," exclaimed the young man, without removing a gigantic cigar from between his lips, "how dismally you're staring at that water! It looks as if you were contemplating *felo de se*, b' Jove. What's the row, old boy? and how do you happen to be alone? Where's the *fiancée*?"

"I—I was thinking of some family matters, not **very** pleasant ones," Mr. Tredethlyn answered, simply.

"But where's the *future*?"

"The what?"

"The *future*—Mrs. Francis Tredethlyn that is to be—the Desmond. Why, has the lovely Julia deserted her Frank? Why, you dear, simple old baby, how you blush! Is it a crime to be in love with a handsome girl? I only wish your young affections had fixed themselves on one of my five sisters."

—all most amiable girls, but without so much as a spoonful of what our lively neighbours call *potage*."

Francis Tredethlyn stared aghast at the young official.

"Why, you don't suppose—you don't think that I—that Miss Desmond—that—"

"You know those silversmiths on the Boulevards—no, you don't know Paris, by the bye. Well, dear boy, there are Parisian silversmiths who make a great display in their shop windows by means of a concatenation of table-spoons and a strong flare of gas; but I doubt if in all Paris there was ever such a notorious case of spoons as the present; and I don't blame you, my dear Tredethlyn. If I were not Alexander, I would be the other person. If I were not madly and hopelessly in love with blue-eyed Maude, I should fling myself at the feet of dark-eyed Julia: such teeth, and such a generally regal *tournure*, with thirty-thousand a-year, ought to make a sensation. Frank, I congratulate you! Bless you, my boy, and be happy!" Mr. Somerset wrung his friend's hand with effusion.

"But, my dear Somerset—but, upon my word and honour," cried Mr. Tredethlyn, in extreme terror and perplexity, "Miss Desmond has been very kind to me; and feeling myself out of place here, I've been grateful for her kindness; but, as I am an honest man, not one word has ever passed between us upon any but the commonest subjects; and I am sure that neither she nor I have the slightest idea of—"

"Oh, you haven't, eh?" asked Montagu Somerset, taking his cigar from his mouth, and staring at it in a contemplative manner, as he knocked away the ash; "never mind about Miss Desmond; you haven't any idea of making her mistress of yourself and your property, real and personal, eh? You admire her very much, and are very grateful to her for being civil to you, and so on, but you have no idea of making her an offer of marriage?"

"No more than I have of making you such an offer."

"Then in that case," replied Mr. Somerset deliberately, "all I have to say is to this effect: look out for squalls; when you are coasting on a shore renowned for its quicksands, you'd better beware of any strange light you may see ahead, for the illumination generally means danger. When you meet with such a girl as the Desmond, don't trifle with her. Of course it's very pleasant to ride, and drive, and play billiards, and loiter through a summer month or so with a handsome girl, meaning nothing serious all the time; and it is to be done with impunity, if you are careful in your selection of the young lady. But I don't think Julia Desmond is exactly the sort of girl you should try it on with. There are men in our place, apoplectic old fogies in starched neckcloths and no end of waistcoat, who

knew the Desmond's father; he was a south-of-Ireland man and a notorious duellist. They say that Julia inherits his eyes and teeth."

"But you don't mean to say that I've done Miss Desmond any wrong?" cried Francis. "How should I be otherwise than grateful to her when she was kind to me, and set me at my ease somehow, and made me feel a little less like an Ojibbeway Indian suddenly let loose amongst fashionable people? How should I imagine that she would think of me except as—as Miss Hillary thinks of me?" His voice grew low, and an inexpressible change came over his whole manner as he mentioned Maude Hillary's name. "They know my history, and that this time last year I was a private in a foot regiment, with nothing higher to hope for than an extra stripe upon my sleeve."

"Miss Hillary is one person and Miss Desmond is another," Mr. Somerset replied, with just the least suspicion of *hauteur*. "The lovely Julia's face is her fortune, you know, dear boy. You ask me if you've been wrong; and I tell you frankly, as a gentleman, that I think you have. A man can't be exclusive in his attentions to a woman without other people perceiving the fact, and forming their own conclusions thereupon. I know everyone who comes here regards the matter as settled, and I heard Maude say the other day that she thought you a very good fellow—*she* didn't say fellow,—and would be delighted to see her dear Julia so pleasantly established."

"Did she say that?" cried Francis, with a dusky blush kindling under his dark skin; "did she speak well of me? And if—if she should think I have done Miss Desmond some kind of wrong by usurping her society and setting people talking about us—if *she* should think me mean or base—"

Montagu Somerset interrupted Mr. Tredethlyn by a long whistle.

"Oh! the wind's in that quarter, is it?" he exclaimed; "you're down in that list; then in that case I've nothing more to say. The river flows at your feet, my dear friend; and I dare say there's a rope for sale somewhere in the villages of Twickenham or Isleworth."

The young man sauntered away, leaving Francis with his arms folded on the balustrade, and his face darker than it had been, even when he had thought remorsefully of his missing cousin.

Miss Desmond had not made such very bad use of her time. With consummate tact she had contrived to detain Francis Tredethlyn at her side in all those pleasant walks, and drives, and boating excursions, which made up a great part of life at the Cedars; and it had seemed that the young man, of his own option, devoted himself to Colonel Desmond's daughter. Julia

had been clever enough to set the simple Cornishman entirely at his ease in her presence, and having done that, all the rest followed naturally enough. It was to Miss Desmond that Francis Tredehlyn confided his opinions upon every subject; it was to Miss Desmond that he applied for enlightenment when his ignorance fenced him about with cloud and darkness, and seemed to shut him out from the people round him. When the visitors at the Cedars were busy in the animated discussion of some new book whose name Francis had never heard, and whose contents would have been utterly beyond his untrained understanding, Julia would explain to him the nature of the volume, simplifying the subject with a dexterity that was all her own, but never humiliating her companion by any display of her own superiority. If art was the subject of discussion, Julia insidiously demonstrated to the Cornishman the merits and demerits of any given picture. So Francis Tredehlyn had been considerably benefited by three months of intimacy with a handsome and accomplished woman, and he began to feel something like a well-disposed Maori who had been admitted into familiar intercourse with a family of friendly settlers.

But all this time, in spite of handsome, dark-eyed Julia's kindness, in spite of all the benefits to be derived from intimate relations with such agreeable people as the guests who were always to be found at Twickenham, the one charm that had held the young man constant to the Cedars,—like some spell-bound knight in a fairy story, who cannot leave an enchanted castle, though he knows that peril and ruin lurk within its walls,—the one supreme influence that had taken possession of Francis Tredehlyn had been the presence of Maude Hillary. From first to last his faith had never wavered, but his devotion had been the servile worship of an idolator, who was prepared to find his divinity hard and merciless. No thought of ever being anything nearer to Maude Hillary than he now was entered the young man's mind. She was beautiful, amiable, loving,—for had he not seen her with her father? She was all that is most lovely and adorable in womankind: but she was not for him. In her presence his ignorance and awkwardness seemed to weigh him down to the very dust; and yet she was never unkind to him, or supercilious, or insolent. She was only indifferent: but Oh, the bitterness of her indifference! the anguish of the slavish worshipper who prostrates himself before his idol, and knows all the while that it is stone, and cannot have pity upon him! Again and again Francis Tredehlyn had determined that he would come no more to the Cedars. He would call on Mr. Hillary in the City some morning, and thank him for his hospitable kindness; and then he would buy a commission in a cavalry regiment newly ordered for Indian service.

"Why should I be always coming here?" he thought. "They're all very good to me, the young swells. But I feel awkward amongst them still; and even if I could fall into their ways, and make myself like them, which I can't, where would be the good? I don't want to be a 'swell,' I should like to be a soldier, with a regiment of glorious fellows to call me captain; or a farmer, with half a county to ride over, and a thousand sturdy labourers to take wages from me on a Saturday night; or a merchant, like Mr. Hillary, with a small fleet of ships on the high seas. That sort of thing would be life. But to dawdle in a billiard-room; or lounge at Tattersall's, and buy a horse one doesn't want, out of sheer idleness, and sell him at a loss three weeks afterwards; or to go for a yachting excursion off the Isle of Wight, with men to do all the work, and nothing to do one's self except lie on one's back and smoke and drink pale ale all day long: I can't fancy such a life as that. So, why should I come here any more? I can't fall naturally into these people's habits. I think sometimes that I was happier out yonder, brushing the captain's clothes and talking to the convicts. What a fellow that Surly Bill was! By Jove, that man had seen life!"

Mr. Tredethlyn, lounging perpetually in the gardens by the river, conscious of his incapability of breaking the spell that bound him, thought, with some touch of envy, of the brilliant career of his late acquaintance, Surly Bill the burglar. But now the Cornishman had been all at once aroused from the pleasant torpor which had crept upon him in this modern Castle of Indolence. All that was most generous in the young man's nature arose in revolt against the thought that he had wronged Julia Desmond. "It seems so hard that she should have set these people talking about her by her kindness to an ignorant fellow like me. It must do a girl harm to have her name bandied about by an idle young fellow like Somerset. And she stands alone in the world, too, with no father or brother to take her part. I ought to have told that fellow to hold his tongue, and I will, too, before I leave this house to-night. But *this* decides me, at any rate. I've been here too much; I'll buy a commission and go out to India, and the lawyers must look after poor little Susy."

## CHAPTER XIV.

### VERY PRIVATE THEATRICALS.

THE river was gray and dim in the twilight by this time; for the first half of October was gone, and the dusky shadows gathered early on Mr. Hillary's lawn. Francis Tredethlyn found the gardens deserted when he left the terrace, and walked slowly

towards the house, where lights were gleaming in innumerable windows. The young man had only ridden down to Twickenham that morning, and had no special engagement to dine at the Cedars.

"I'll go round to the stables at once," he thought, "and I can call in Moorgate Street to-morrow, and tell Mr. Hillary that I think of going abroad. Why should I see *her* again? The sight of her will only make me foolish, and keep me here in spite of myself."

The lady thus vaguely alluded to was not Miss Desmond; but when Francis Tredethlyn entered Mr. Hillary's house by the first open window that presented itself on the upper terrace, he found himself in a little study much affected by the ladies of the household, and came suddenly upon a female figure sitting alone in the dark.

Something like a guilty pang shot through him as he recognized that stately figure, even in the shadowy obscurity of the unlighted room. In the next moment there was a rustling of silk, and Miss Desmond had risen and was facing him in the twilight.

"Yes, it *is* Mr. Tredethlyn," she said, presently. "What have you been doing with yourself all the afternoon? There has been a grand discussion about some amateur theatricals, concerning which Maude Hillary is absolutely bewitched, and we want you to act."

"I think you've got plenty of fellows who'll act better than I can, Miss Desmond; though I did try my hand at the business once in Van Diemen's Land; and I'd be glad to make myself useful in any way that would please Miss Hillary, if it was to dress myself as a footman and carry a tea-tray or a scuttle of coals; but I think I shall be leaving England before the theatricals come off; in point of fact, I think I shall be leaving England directly."

"Leaving England!"

The expression of those two words could scarcely have been more tragical than it was; and yet for once in a way Miss Desmond was *not* acting. All in a moment she saw the fair edifice which she had schemed to build for herself crumbling into ruin and chaos.

"Leaving England!" she repeated,—"you think of leaving England, Mr. Tredethlyn?"

She put her hands to her forehead with a little tragic gesture: and Francis Tredethlyn wished that he had entered the house by any other door or window than that which he had chosen.

Julia's dismay was entirely real; for the disappointment was very bitter to this young lady; who had built up a fair future

for herself on the foundation of Francis Tredethlyn's wealth. The grim walls of Castle Desmond, the silver waters of the Shannon, the green hill sides and lonely valleys, made themselves into a picture that shut out the dusky room, and then melted into gray blankness. She had meant to do such great things with Francis Tredethlyn's thirty thousand a year!

The young man stood looking at her in as much embarrassment as if he had been guilty of some wilful deception. He was so little of a coxcomb, that it was very difficult for him to imagine that his sudden departure could give pain to the brilliant Julia. He was so entirely simple and true-hearted, that no suspicion of Miss Desmond's mercenary views had any place in his mind.

There was a very brief pause, and then Julia murmured, in slow, half-broken accents—

“ You are really going away?—but why? ”

“ Oh, Miss Desmond, I scarcely like to tell you why; and yet it's not altogether on that account,” answered Francis, vaguely. “ There are other reasons. I am not in my right place amongst such people as I meet here. I'm a rough, uneducated fellow, and idleness doesn't suit me. I want to be of some use in the world. Why, I felt myself a better man out yonder, without sixpence in my pocket, than I am to-day, in spite of Oliver Tredethlyn's money. So I mean to buy a commission and go out to India, where there's some fighting to be done.”

“ You are not telling me the truth, Mr. Tredethlyn. This is not your real reason for running away from the Cedars, as if the house were infected.”

“ My dear Miss Desmond, I—you have been so kind to me—you have made me feel so much at home here, where, but for you, I must have felt myself so miserably out of place.”

“ Why should you be out of place amongst these people? ” cried Julia, drawing up her head with a proud gesture, “ unless,” she murmured, in a thoughtful undertone—“ unless because these people are so much beneath you.”

Miss Desmond had entirely recovered herself by this time. All at once, after sitting a long time at the table, playing her cards with infinite tact and patience,—all at once she found herself losing the game, and saw that only the boldest play could help her. But Julia was equal to the situation. The second of December had come upon her very suddenly; but she did not despair of triumphing by a *coup d'état*.

“ Tell me the truth, Mr. Tredethlyn,” she said, looking Francis full in the face, with her eyes and teeth gleaming in the twilight; “ why are you going to leave this house? Why do you talk of hurrying away from England? ”

“ Because—because—I have done you a wrong in absorbing

so much of your society, Miss Desmond, and the people here have begun to mix your name with mine. I cannot bear that you, who are so superior to me, should be humiliated by such an association; especially when there is no foundation for their talk," Francis Tredethlyn added, in considerable embarrassment.

"Oh, I understand it all now," answered Julia, with an unutterable bitterness in her tone; "you have been warned against me, Mr. Tredethlyn. I am only a fortune-huntress, and I have been spreading my toils about your innocent footsteps, and it is only by flight that you can save yourself. Oh, yes!" she cried, with an ironical laugh, which seemed to express a keener anguish than another woman's wildest sob, "I know how these people talk!"

"Miss Desmond, on my honour——"

"Mr. Tredethlyn, on *my* honour, I know the world better than you do. If you had devoted yourself to any other woman in this house, to any daughter of that mercantile aristocracy in which Mr. Hillary rules supreme, no sneering comments would have greeted your ear. But what am I—the daughter of the Desmonds of Desmond—amongst these people? What am I but Maude Hillary's dependant and companion? I am poor, and I endure poverty in its most cruel bitterness; for I am poor amongst the vulgar rich. Who can give me credit for sincerity? who dare trust in my friendship? I am a well-bred pauper, a fortune-huntress, an adventuress, a creature whose smiles are to be dreaded, whose society is to be avoided. O Francis Tredethlyn," cried Julia, with a sudden shiver of agony, which would have done credit to a Rachel, "*I know so well* what has been said to you. Go—go at once. You are wise to accept the warning conveyed in these people's insolent insinuations. Go—there is a gulf between you and me, for you are rich and I am poor. Beware of me even when I seem most sincere. Remember that I am a pauper, and the descendant of paupers—paupers who shed their blood and squandered their fortunes in a losing cause; paupers who died for the love of honour and loyalty, two words that would seem the emptiest sounds to merchants and tradesmen. Oh, Mr. Tredethlyn, have pity upon me, and go."

And then Miss Desmond broke down all at once into a burst of hysterical sobbing, and stretching out her hand towards the back of a *prie-dieu* chair standing near her, tottered as if she would have fallen. She did not fall, however; for before her hand could reach the *prie-dieu*, Francis Tredethlyn's strong arm was round her.

"Miss Desmond," he cried, "Julia! why do you talk like this? Do you think that any base thought about you ever

entered my brain? Fortune-huntress, adventuress—did I ever wrong you in my inmost thoughts by such a name as that?"

"No," answered Julia, softly. "You are too noble; and yet you may have been influenced by others. Why should you think better of me than others think? Why should not you too despise me?"

Her voice was broken by sobs, and she was still supported by Mr. Tredethlyn's arm. He felt that she was trembling violently. He could just distinguish her handsome profile in the dusk, and the tears glittering upon her dark lashes.

"Despise you, Julia! you who are so superior to me! Do you forget what I am? Have I not much greater reason to fear your contempt? And you talk of poverty, as if that were so deep a suffering, while I am so rich, and care so little for my money. Share it with me, Julia. I'm only a poor waif and stray as it is; but with such a woman as you for my wife I might be of some good in the world. Heaven knows you are welcome to my fortune, Miss Desmond. If you were a man, and my comrade, I would say, Share it with me as my brother and my friend. But you are a woman, and I can only say, Be my wife."

Julia withdrew herself from the supporting arm.

"Ah, Mr. Tredethlyn," she said, in an icy kind of voice, "this is the bitterest insult of all. The Desmonds do not marry for money; they only marry where they are beloved, and can love again."

"How can I expect that you can love me?" asked Francis. "Do you think I can forget that I am an ignorant boor, suddenly thrown amongst people whose habits of life, whose very thoughts, are strange to me?"

"And you would marry a woman without so much as asking for her love?"

"I would ask for her friendship and her fidelity. I shouldn't care to exact an uneven bargain, Miss Desmond; and I doubt if I could give much more myself," the young man answered, rather coldly. But at the sound of a stifled sob from Julia he changed his tone all at once; a thousand generous impulses were stirred in him by the aspect of her distress. He was nothing more than a child in the hands of this brilliant young Irishwoman.

"Dear Miss Desmond," he cried, "I seem destined to offend and grieve you. If you will share my fortune, if you will accept my best friendship and fidelity, my whole life shall prove to you how much I admire and respect you. If you reject my offer, I can only say——"

But Julia did not allow him to finish the sentence, which she

foresaw would be expressive of complete resignation to her adverse decision.

"Oh, Francis," she exclaimed, "you offer me your *fortune!*" There was something sublime in her contemptuous enunciation of this last word. "You ask me to accept your friendship, when I have been weak and mad enough to *LOVE YOU.*" She was not Rachel any longer; she was Madame Dorval, all melting tenderness and womanly pathos. She covered her face with her hands, and then, with something between a sob and a shudder, rushed suddenly from the room, and hurried along the dusky staircase and passages to her own apartment.

The candles were lighted on the dressing-table; but there was no intrusive handmaiden to annoy Miss Desmond by her watchful glances, her mute interrogation. Julia looked at her reflection in the glass, and saw herself flushed and triumphant, with traces of tears upon her cheeks.

"And my eyes are really wet," she thought; "but then the chance was such a good one, and so nearly lost. What a good, simple-hearted fellow he is! and how happy any reasonable woman might be with him—and thirty thousand a year! Ah, Maude Hillary! it was very pretty and childish and nice of you, coming to wake me out of my sleep on your last birthday, to show me the set of diamonds and opals papa had bribed your maid to slip under your pillow before you awoke; but I will show you diamonds before long that shall make you ashamed of that birthday trumpery."

Miss Desmond rolled her black hair into a great smooth knot at the back of her head; and she put on a dress of that fugitive golden yellow, in which there is an artful intermingling of silvery sheen, and which milliners call maize—a bewilderingly beautiful colour when seen in conjunction with a handsome brunette. The loungers who dined at the Cedars that evening declared that Julia Desmond had never looked so splendid. Francis Tredehlyn sat by her at dinner, and was near her all the evening: and at night, when he found himself alone in the pretty chintz-curtain chamber that he had so often occupied of late, the young man seated himself by one of the windows, and, pushing open the sash, looked out at the quiet river rippling softly under the stars.

"And she is to be my wife," he thought; "she is very handsome, and I ought to be proud to think that she can care for such a fellow as I. And yet—" His head sank forward on his folded arms, and the image of a beautiful creature smiled before him in all the dazzling brightness of an opium-eater's dream. Francis Tredehlyn gave one long regretful sigh as he raised his head, and looked moodily out at the distant woodland on the other side of the river.

"What can it matter whom I marry?" he asked himself, bitterly; "would *she* ever think of me, if I were to come to this house every day for ten years at a stretch? Why, her dogs are more to her and dearer to her twenty times than I am. And Julia Desmond loves me, and thinks me better than those fellows with the yellow whiskers, who are always talking of new books and new music. They please *her*; but Julia despises them. Am I such a wretch that I cannot be grateful for a sensible woman's affection? I *am* grateful to her. I am proud to think that she will be my wife. But I wish I was back in Van Diemen's Land, blacking the captain's boots, and smoking shag tobacco with Surly Bill the burglar."

After that dramatic little scene in the twilight study at the Cedars, everything went on velvet. Julia was triumphant; Maude was delighted and sympathetic. What could be more charming or more proper than that Julia should marry a man with thirty thousand a year for his fortune? The only hindrance to universal happiness in a very delightful world was the fact that so many people had to do *without* thirty thousand a year, Miss Hillary thought, whenever she gave her mind to the study of political economy.

"And you will be so rich, dear Julia," Maude said, as she kissed her friend; "and if Harcourt and I are very poor—as we must be, unless papa gives his consent by-and-by—you'll take us for a drive in the Park sometimes, won't you?" And if you give many parties in the season, I shan't be able to come to them; for you wouldn't like to see me always in the same dress—like those poor people at the Union—and I shall be obliged to get a set of black-lace flounces, like Reder—you never saw Reder, my last German governess but one—and put them on pink silk one day, and blue the next, and so on; it's very troublesome, and the flounces don't generally come straight; but then it looks as if one had so many dresses. Of course you'll have boxes at *both* houses, Julia, and on the grand tier? and you'll buy a place in the country—and Oh, where do you mean to live in town?"

Miss Desmond answered all these eager queries very demurely. Francis would make all arrangements for their future life, she said; he *had* certainly promised her the two opera-boxes; he had made inquiries about the one house that was to be let in Park Lane; and he was anxious to discover her favourite county before taking any steps towards the purchase of an estate.

"But you know he is such a dear good fellow, and has such a knack of guessing all my fancies, that really I never like to suggest anything," Miss Desmond concluded, modestly. *But*,

somewhat or other, without making any very direct suggestions, Julia had so contrived matters, that in a few weeks her affianced husband had gratified many of the desires that had been smouldering in her breast ever since the earliest dawn of girlhood.

Already the "family jools" of the Desmonds had been consigned to the oblivion of one of Julia's shabbiest trunks, and diamonds now twinkled on Miss Desmond's neck and arms, and gleamed here and there in her black hair, when she came down to dinner in her maize silk dress. Her toilette-table was all of a glitter with the rings she drew off her slim fingers when she disrobed at night, before the looking-glass which had so often reflected a gloomy, discontented face, but which now only gave back triumphant smiles.

She was an adventuress perhaps, and her triumph was an ignoble one; but she was not altogether base. She was prepared to be a good wife to the man whom she had brought to her feet by force of feminine strategy. She did not love Francis Tredethlyn; and indeed she seemed to be made of a sterner stuff than that out of which the women who can love are fashioned. She did not love her affianced husband; but she meant to be as faithful and devoted as the most loving wife in Christendom. If she intended to raise herself upon the platform of her husband's wealth, she meant that he should mount with her. Already she had lifted him several stages on the social ladder. From the very first her watchful care had saved him from a hundred small solecisms, and in the more intimate relationship of the last few weeks her refining influence had been almost magical in its effects. The good old blood of the Tredethlyns asserted itself, and Julia found her task an easy one.

"I don't want you to be like those Government clerks, and magazine writers, and embryo Q.C.'s," she said to him sometimes. "I like you to be big and deep-voiced and—just a little clumsy. The Knights-Templars, and Crusaders, and that sort of people, must have been clumsy on account of their armour. I always fancy I hear the clank of spurs when you come into a room: and when you sit in Parliament you must be the soldier's friend, you know, and make great speeches about rations, and court-martial verdicts, and discipline, and all that sort of thing; and I shall come into the ladies' gallery, and strain my eyes by peering at you through that horrible grating. You will look so handsome with your head thrown a little back, and your hand in your waistcoat."

Now this kind of talk from a handsome woman, whom he knows to be infinitely his intellectual superior, can scarcely be displeasing to the most strong-minded of men; and, unluckily, Francis Tredethlyn was not very strong-minded. He looked down at his Julia with a sheepish smile, and acknowledged her

pretty flatteries in the lamest possible manner; but when he came to the Cedars next morning, he brought with him the biggest emerald-headed serpent that he had been able to find among the jewellers of the West End, and coiled it about his Julia's wrist. He was grateful to her for all her tender smiles and pleasant speeches—all the more grateful, perhaps, because of that uncomfortable knowledge of the cold void in his own heart, where love for his promised wife should have been. So he brought her all manner of costly tribute in the way of rings and bracelets, and necklaces and head-gear; and he bought her a three-hundred-guinea hunter at Tattersall's, so that she should no longer ride Maude Hillary's horses in the Twickenham lanes. Sometimes, in spite of himself, even when Julia was most agreeable, the thought came upon him that he would only too gladly have given her the whole of his fortune if by such a gift he might have freed himself from the promise that bound him to her.

"But if I were free to-morrow, *she* would not care for me," he thought, "and what would be the use of my liberty?"

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## CHAPTER XV.

### A COMMERCIAL CRISIS.

THE private theatricals at the Cedars were postponed till Christmas, and in the middle of November Mr. Hillary removed his household to a big bow-windowed habitation at the western end of Brighton. Francis Tredethlyn followed, as in duty bound, and spent a great portion of his life in hurrying to and fro between London and Brighton by express trains. Never had a better adorer done suit and service to a mistress. There were no lovers' quarrels, no temporary estrangements between these two people. A serene and cloudless sky heralded the coming splendour of their union, and Maude declared again and again that she had never seen such a model pair of lovers.

"Harcourt and I were always quarrelling, you know, Julia," she said; "but then we were both such horribly jealous creatures. I didn't like his turning over music for other girls; though I suppose he was right, poor fellow, and a man must either turn over music or shut himself from society altogether. And he didn't like my going down to dinner with people in crack cavalry regiments; but I'm afraid we rather enjoyed ourselves when we quarrelled, and I used to feel as if it would be the easiest thing in the world to part from him for ever, and go into a convent, or marry somebody I hated, or something of that kind; and then directly we *had* parted, I used to get so silly and miserable, and used to write him such penitent letters,

taking all the blame upon myself, and making an idiot of him. But it's so nice to see you and Mr. Tredethlyn, and I'm sure he'll be the dearest husband in the world, Julia, and you'll be able to twist him round your little finger."

It was not with a feeling of unalloyed pleasure that Miss Desmond accepted her friend's congratulations. She was quite ready to admit that Francis Tredethlyn was a model lover, and promised to be the most submissive husband that ever bowed himself before a clever wife's dominion. His presents were munificent, his attention was unfailing, his temper serenely even; and yet there were times when Julia Desmond felt that all was not quite as it should have been.

She had angled very successfully, and the fish she had landed was a splendid prize, victoriously snatched from all other anglers; but Oh, what a difference there is between that poor deluded fish, entrapped out of the free waters by the cruel hook of the angler, and the willing bird which flies, of its own loving impulse, to the breast where it fain would shelter!

Julia Desmond knew that, in securing a husband, she had not won for herself a lover; and the knowledge pained and humiliated her. It was a small thing that she should not love Francis; but it seemed very hard that Francis should not love her. Her womanly tact would have stood in the place of affection, and she would have been lavish in the expenditure of a spurious coin, in the way of pretty words and tender looks, which should have had all the glitter and some of the vibration of the real mintage. But with Francis it was altogether different. The young man had no power to simulate; and there was a deadly coldness in his wooing that chilled the proud Irish girl's heart.

"Are they worth the humiliation?" she thought sometimes, when she contemplated her diamonds before the lighted glass in her bedroom at Brighton. "They are very big and brilliant and costly; but I've seen myself look handsomer with a scrap of scarlet ribbon twisted in my hair, than I look to-night with all these stars and crosses and serpents flashing and twinkling about me. And then, when I go down stairs, I must go through all the old stereotyped business; and when I thank him for the flowers that he sent me this morning, he will look at me with his cold eyes, and tell me he is pleased to have given me pleasure. What is he but a clod—a mere clod, nothing but a clod? I ought to remember that; and yet I am angry with him because he does not love me. Why can I not be thankful for my good fortune, and accept my future husband for what he is,—a respectable, well-behaved ploughman, whom an accident has endowed with thirty thousand a year?"

Perhaps Miss Desmond did not particularly care to answer

that question which she put to herself in so impatient a spirit. And yet it was a question that might have been answered, had she cared to fathom the lower deeps of her own mind. But then there *are* questions which are better left unanswered. Why was she angry with Francis Tredethlyn for that passionless serenity of manner which was so nearly akin to indifference? Why? unless it was because in her own heart there lurked the consciousness that the unpolished Cornishman *might* have been a very different kind of lover; and that beneath his cold exterior there were slumbering embers which *might have* blazed into glory had one special torch been applied to them.

Yes, Julia knew this, and the knowledge was a perpetual poison that embittered the wine of success. The pride of the Desmonds had not been entirely trodden out beneath the iron heel of poverty. This girl, who had not been too proud to set herself to ensnare a rich husband, was yet proud enough to feel the bitterness of her degradation.

"If he only loved me," she thought, "I should feel that the bargain was a fair one. But to know that, at best, he only submits to the force of circumstances! He has been drifted into the position of a lover, and he performs the duties exacted of him; just like some non-dancing man who has been persuaded to dance in order to fill the last place in a quadrille, and who dawdles listlessly through the figures, and almost yawns in the face of his partner. And yet I have seen him look at *her* until the dull clay of which he is made seemed to change into a thing of life and fire."

And then Miss Desmond was fain to turn to her new jewel-case for consolation, and to beguile her mind from unpleasant thoughts by the consideration of all those grand things that may be done with thirty thousand a year.

If the young ladies of the household thought it a pleasant thing to spend the brief November afternoons on that delightful esplanade beside the sea, Mr. Hillary did not find a residence in Brighton so entirely convenient. A great deal of his time was spent in journeys to and fro by the best and quickest express train in England: and there were days when even the facilities of a Brighton railway would not enable the merchant to take his dinner in the society of his beautiful daughter and her companion. There were occasions on which the two girls sat for a wearisome hour or so, trying vainly to amuse themselves by some feminine occupation, or to beguile the time by some feminine discourse, while the soup grew cold and the Brightonian cook grew angry; and then at last were fain to sit down at nine o'clock, and make a dismal pretence of dining without the head of the household.

"I sometimes think so much railway travelling must be bad

for papa," Maude said. "I am afraid it must shake him a little; though riding in the Brighton express is almost as good as sitting in one's own room. I fancy papa has not looked so well lately. I have begged him to see Mr. Desborough, our Twickenham doctor, or some London physician; but it's no use, for he won't listen to me. I can't tell you how uneasy I am about him, Julia. He has had so many of his bad headaches lately; and then he says the business in Moorgate Street has been so heavy. Ah, Julia! what is the good of being rich, if papa must work as he does?"

Miss Desmond shrugged her shoulders.

"Business men seem scarcely to exist out of their offices," she said, rather scornfully. She always took care to let Maude know that she looked down upon the Twickenham splendour and its commercial sources. "I dare say your papa will devote himself to money-making as long as he lives."

"I sometimes think we might have been happier if we had been poorer," Maude said, dreamily, by-and-by. "I can't help fancying how we might have lived in some quiet country place, in a low-roofed, old-fashioned cottage, with a garden all round it and a churchyard close by, and the smell of cows and the cooing of pigeons; and then I need not have been separated from—." She did not finish the sentence; she was talking to herself rather than to Julia. Her face was beautified by an inexpressible softness and tenderness as she murmured that broken sentence. Her thoughts wandered back to the time in which she and Harcourt Lowther had sworn eternal constancy, standing with their hands locked together in the dim summer twilight, on the bank of the shadowy river. She thought of that time, and all the freshness of feeling that had gone down with it came back upon her suddenly, like a breath of air from a distant ocean. How frivolous her life had been since then!—how selfish and useless! What a round of dress and decoration, and hurry and weariness! Harcourt Lowther's last letter was in her pocket as she sat musing despondently by the hired Brighton hearth;—his last letter, a most melancholy epistle, full of despairing lamentations about the bitterness of separation and the hardships of Van Diemen's Land. And over and above all these feminine perplexities which tormented poor loving Maude, there seemed real cause for anxiety in the state of Mr. Hillary's health. It was not that the merchant himself complained; he did not complain, and, indeed, appeared to resent any inquiries as to his state, even when those inquiries came from such a privileged person as his only child. But every morning at the breakfast-table, sitting opposite to her father in the bright sunlight, Maude could see a darker shade under Mr. Hillary's eyes, a more weary look about his haggard face. She defied his anger

very often, and pleaded earnestly with him, imploring him to consult a physician; but his answer was always very much the same.

"I am subject to this sort of headache; my work in Moorgate Street is peculiarly hard just now. Pray do not trouble yourself, Maude; there is not the least occasion for any uneasiness about my health."

With such assurances as these Miss Hillary was compelled to be satisfied. There had been an air of coldness, or almost displeasure, in her father's manner to her lately, and Maude found to her surprise that he was by no means pleased with the matrimonial engagement that had arisen between Julia Desmond and Francis Tredethlyn.

"Engaged to *her*!" the merchant exclaimed, when his daughter carried him the news of Julia's conquest,—"engaged to Julia Desmond! Why, I fully believed that he came to Twickenham on your account, Maude. I said nothing to you about the matter, because girls have sometimes such absurd notions, and I thought it better to let things take their course. And so Julia has entrapped him, has she? I ought to have been on my guard against Ryan O'Brien Desmond's daughter."

"How can you talk like that, papa?" cried Miss Hillary. "I'm sure Julia and Mr. Tredethlyn are really in love with each other, and dear Julia is perfectly disinterested. And then, if Mr. Tredethlyn had been ever so much in love with me—and I'm sure he never cared the least bit about me—how could you suppose that I could ever dream of marrying him; when I—when he's such a very common kind of person?"

Harcourt Lowther's name had been almost trembling on Miss Hillary's lips, but she had remembered her father's aversion to that name, and had modified the conclusion of her sentence in deference to his prejudice.

"A very common kind of person!" repeated Lionel Hillary, in a thoughtful tone; "yes, yes, my dear. I dare say he is, I dare say he is. But I've seen women as beautiful as you married to commoner men than Francis Tredethlyn."

And then, after a brief silence, the merchant's manner changed all of a sudden; he took his daughter in his arms, and pressed his lips upon her forehead with an almost passionate fondness.

"My darling! my darling!" he cried, "do you think it wouldn't please me to see you married to a man you could love?"

Maude looked up into his face with a sweet smile upon her own: her lips parted, and in the next moment Harcourt Lowther's name would have been spoken and his cause pleaded by those innocent lips. But it seemed as if her father in a manner anticipated what she would have said; for he put her from him suddenly, and turned away with a faint shiver of pain.

"I am very sorry to hear of this engagement between Julia and that young man," he said, with his face averted from his daughter, and his hands nervously shuffling among the papers on the table before him. "I am very much vexed. There, go, Maude; you don't understand, you can't understand. Go, my dear; I'm busy."

No more than this had ever been said between the father and daughter upon the subject of Miss Desmond's matrimonial arrangements; but Maude had been able to discover that her father's vexation was not a matter of the moment, to be forgotten and done with after the first surprise of the announcement. Lionel Hillary was tolerably gracious to Mr. Tredethlyn, but his manner towards Julia changed altogether. There were times when he scarcely took the trouble to conceal his displeasure from that young lady herself. He would sit watching her moodily when Francis Tredethlyn was by her side, and would sometimes, when the conversation gave him an opening, break out into some cynical generality upon the husband-hunting propensities of modern young ladies. Francis was too simple-minded to comprehend the drift of these covert sneers; but Julia understood her benefactor, and defied him with her bold handsome eyes and her flashing teeth.

"He wanted thirty thousand a year for his daughter, I suppose," she thought, when she pondered on Mr. Hillary's courtesy. "What grasping, avaricious creatures these rich people are!"

Christmas was approaching, and that festival period was to be spent at the Cedars, to which place Maude Hillary was tenderly attached, despite her sentimental talk about poverty and a simple home deep down in the heart of rustic England. The young ladies' portmanteaus had been packed ready for the departure from Brighton, and Maude and Julia only waited for Mr. Hillary to escort them on their homeward journey. He had not been so much with them during the last week or so of their sojourn: and as Francis Tredethlyn only came backwards and forwards with Mr. Hillary, the girls had been left by themselves, with no better occupation or amusement than the reading of new books, the trying of new music, and a contemplation of the blusterous gray waves beating eternally before their windows: for the weather had been cold and stormy of late, and the delicious esplanade had been deserted; only an occasional masculine wanderer, out for a "constitutional," buffeted the winds and strode in dismal loneliness along the pavement beneath Mr. Hillary's windows.

It was only natural, under these circumstances, that the young ladies should have grown weary of Brighton. They had a close carriage at their disposal; but then driving through

perpetual tempest is not particularly agreeable even in a close carriage. They went shopping in East Street two or three times during the severe weather, and bought expensive materials for impossible complications of Berlin-wool work and gold beads; and, experimentalizing with the same on their return home, discovered themselves at sea in a wide ocean of perplexity. Thus it was that they grew very tired of Brighton, and wished most earnestly for Mr. Hillary's coming.

"Oh, for the silvery ring of my own Broadwood!" exclaimed Maude, as she rose from a struggle with a German rendering of "Polly, put the kettle on," in seven flats, and ten pages of double arpeggios. "I wonder *who* makes the pianos for houses that are let furnished? I'm sure they must all be made by the same man; and I suppose it's a theory of his own that makes him always use damp wood, and put so much flannel into his trebles.—I wish papa would come and take us home, Julia."

Miss Hillary expressed this wish at least twenty times in a day; and Julia echoed it, as if out of pure sympathy. But Miss Desmond was not a very sympathetic person, and she was really anxious to get back to the neighbourhood of London and Francis Tredehlyn. Nearly a fortnight had passed since the Cornishman had been to Brighton, and Julia was terribly conscious that the link which united him to her was very fragile, and might be broken by any unlucky hazard—unless, indeed, his constancy were sustained by a chivalrous sense of honour. She had as yet had no opportunity of discovering his sentiments on this subject, and she had a vague idea that a small farmer's son, who had taken the Queen's shilling, would be unlikely to entertain the same splendid notions of truth and loyalty that glowed in the breasts of his superiors.

"I know that he's a very good fellow," Julia thought; "and I don't suppose he would steal anything, or tell a deliberate falsehood; but I dare say he would think it no sin to throw me over at the last moment if——"

There was a point at which Miss Desmond's reveries always stopped short. She did not care to think about that which Francis Tredehlyn might like to do, even if he were free to do as he liked.

Mr. Hillary came home very late upon the evening of an especially disagreeable day. He came down to Brighton by the mail train, and arrived at the hired mansion just as the two girls were gathering together the gold beads and Berlin wools, preparatory to going to bed. But though the merchant had been so much longer away than usual, he seemed in no particular hurry to embrace his daughter; for instead of coming up to the drawing-room, he walked straight to a dreary little study at the back of the house, which had been set apart for his use.

Maude had heard the sonorous knock at the big street door, and flew out of the drawing-room to greet the traveller.

"At last, dear papa!" she cried. "We have been as dull and dreary as a pair of Marianas in a moated grange. Oh, you darling papa! I am so glad you have come! Please take us home to Twickenham: we've had *such* weather; we're as helpless and miserable as those poor working people who go about singing so dreadfully flat when there's a hard frost. 'We are two lonely single girls, and we've got no work to do!'" sang Miss Hillary, with the established nasal drawl, as she skipped down the stairs.

"Kiss me, you wet, cold, melancholy-looking papa," she said, planting herself between Lionel Hillary and the door of his sanctum.

The merchant seemed in no very affectionate humour to-night. He put his daughter aside without looking at her. His face was fixed and stern in expression, and its gloomy rigidity was in no way relaxed as he spoke to Maude.

"Why are you up so late?" he said. "I thought you would have gone to bed an hour ago. I don't want to be worried to-night, Maude. I've some papers down here that want looking into, and I've brought other papers with me. I may have to sit up half the night, perhaps; and, remember, I am not to be disturbed."

"But you will be ill, papa, if you work so hard."

"I shall not be ill, and I know what is best for myself. I cannot and must not be annoyed to-night, Maude."

He went into his room, where the servant had already made an illumination that would have been enough for a chapel or a factory, by means of five flaring gas-burners; but Maude followed him, and was not to be put off even by the harsh words that sounded so strangely in her ears.

"Papa," she remonstrated piteously, "I am sure that you are ill, or that something has happened."

Mr. Hillary laid his hand upon his daughter's shoulder, and put her out of the room,—very gently, but with a certain determination which was quite a new thing in his treatment of this idolized and exacting Maude.

"I tell you, once more, that I am going to be—very busy, and must not—be disturbed." He seemed tired, for the words came slowly, as if the mere utterance of them were a painful exertion. "Good night, my dear; go to bed, and sleep peacefully. God bless you, and take you into his keeping!"

His manner changed all in a moment as he said this, and he caught her suddenly to his breast and kissed her passionately, as he had done on that other day when they had talked of Francis Tredethlyn.

But in the next moment Maude found herself standing out-

side the closed door of her father's retreat, amazed and unhappy. That sudden little gush of affection had been as perplexing to her as Mr. Hillary's unusual sternness of manner. It was all alike strange; and vague fears agitated her as she went slowly up-stairs to the big barren drawing-room, which looked very little more home-like than a first-class waiting-room at a railway station.

Julia had disappeared, and the flaring gas-lamps illuminated a great barren desert of Brussels carpet and emptiness. Dear Julia always remembered that her good looks were her only dower, and took care not to waste them by late watching in the glare of many gas-burners. Maude sighed as she looked round the empty room, and then seated herself at a table adorned with a gaudy cover that looked like a small Turkey carpet. She took up the impossible Berlin-wool work, and the gold beads, and set herself to the task of counting tiny dots and squares on a coloured paper pattern, with a view to discovering where the Berlin-wool left off and the beads began. But she was tired and unhappy, and the bewildering dots and squares made her head ache; so she pushed away the work presently, and roamed restlessly up and down the room: now stopping by a table, and taking up a book, only to open it haphazard and stare blankly at the pages; now lingering by the piano, noiselessly fingering the notes, and tormented with a wild desire to dash into some blusterous march that should startle the slumbering household.

Her father had told her to go to bed. He was going to work very late, and must on no account be disturbed. He had worked late sometimes at Twickenham, but not often; and on those occasions Maude had gone to sleep happily enough, only a little disturbed by the thought of "poor papa" toiling over those cruel business documents. But to-night it was altogether different. At the risk of incurring her father's anger, Miss Hillary paced wearily up and down the desert of Brussels carpet, waiting till she should hear the merchant's step on the stairs, and know that his night's work was over.

She waited, oppressed by a vague uneasiness, and wondering why she was uneasy. Why was it that to-night the thought of her father's toil mingled with all manner of strange fears and misgivings? She was usually so frivolous, so apt to look brightly out upon the sunnier aspects of the world around her; but to-night her heart seemed like a leaden weight in her breast. What was it? why was it? The cheap French clock upon the chimney-piece struck some abnormal number between twelve and twenty, and a distant church clock struck two; but still Miss Hillary waited in vain for that expected step upon the stair. Her father had said that he would be very late, but

she had hoped that at the worst his work would be finished in a couple of hours. The time seemed so intolerably long to Maude Hillary, roaming in a purposeless manner about that big room, or standing in the bay-window to listen to the hoarse roaring of the waves, or sitting down to read for five minutes together, but never once knowing what she was reading.

There had been so few troubles in her life, and looking back at the smooth sunlit ways by which she had wandered from childhood to womanhood, she was seized all at once with a fear that there must be some great grief in store for her. It was quite impossible that she could have altogether withheld herself from some contemplation of that startling question as to her right to be happy in a world where so many people were miserable; but the question had never intruded itself upon her so awfully as to-night.

"I have never had sickness, or death, or sorrow near me," she thought. "My mother died before I was conscious of her existence—as I think—and yet it seems strange that there can be any time when a child is unconscious of a mother's presence, or heedless of her loss. The worst trouble that I can remember is my parting from Harcourt; and I have always hoped that all would come right at last. But to-night—to-night I feel as if there had been something sinful in my happiness. The sermons I have heard at church never came home to me. I never felt that I was a miserable, sinful creature, groping my way upon a thorny path. I'm afraid I have been very wicked; selfish and idle, vain and frivolous."

Looking back at her life, Miss Hillary saw an existence of Twickenham pleasure, water-parties, and pic-nics, Star-and-Garter dinners, perpetual Parisian bonnets, and turquoise bracelets, pet dogs, new novels, opera-boxes, and concert-tickets. Perhaps she had never before watched and waited alone at these still hours of the dead winter-night, and these unusual thoughts may have been only the natural companions of her loneliness.

She looked at her watch a dozen times in an hour, and at last, when it was nearly three o'clock, her patience was exhausted all at once, and she resolved on going down to her father's room.

"He will be very angry with me for sitting up so late," she thought, "but I cannot go to bed until I have seen him. It will be better to see him ever so cross with me than not to see him at all."

Having once arrived at this determination, Maude Hillary ran down stairs and tapped lightly at her father's door. There was no answer, and she repeated that timid tapping. Again there was no answer, and she tried the handle of the door, intending to steal softly in and surprise the merchant at his work. But the

door was locked, and her breath grew thick with the sudden oppression caused by some vague terror. She lost all command over herself, and knocked loudly, calling in a frightened voice, "Papa! papa!"

It was not so strange that she should be frightened. How often she had heard of hard-working City magnates suddenly stricken down in the prime of life by some fell disease, unsuspected until that last fatal moment!

A heavy footstep inside the little room relieved her of these vaguely terrible fears. The door was opened, and Mr. Hillary stood before her, very pale, very angry. "Maude! how absurd this is! What have you been doing? Why have you been sitting up?"

"Because somehow I *couldn't* go to bed while you were working down here, papa darling. I *couldn't*; I *didn't* want to worry you or disobey you; but I *don't* know what's the matter with me to-night. All manner of ridiculous things came into my head, and I felt that I *must* see you before I went to sleep. Let me come in, papa."

She pleaded so prettily, looking up in her father's face with such tender devotion beaming in her own, that Lionel Hillary must have been something harder and sterner than the stoniest of mercantile men if he had been deaf to her pleading.

"Come in if you like, Maude," he said, with a weary sigh; "I am sorry that you disturbed me. I had very nearly finished my work."

The littered mass of papers that had been scattered on Mr. Hillary's desk when Maude had left him were gone now, and only a few neat little packets remained in their stead. But, placed conspicuously upon the desk, Maude perceived a big envelope with a great red seal, and lying near it a smaller envelope also sealed.

The merchant had removed his neckcloth. He seemed to have been working hard, for big drops of moisture stood upon his forehead. A great basket near his chair was filled to overflowing with torn scraps of paper, and the shower of waste had fallen far and wide, and lay like snow about the chair in which Mr. Hillary had been sitting.

"Now, Maude," he asked sternly, as his daughter followed him into the room, "what is it that you want with me?"

"Why, to see you leave your work and go to bed, papa. You don't know how late it is."

The merchant smiled a grim smile, and pointed to his watch, which lay open on the desk.

"I've been working against time, and I've kept watch upon every quarter of an hour," he said.

"But you have finished now, papa."

"Not quite. I have very nearly finished—but not quite."

Miss Hillary shook her head with a pretty petulant gesture. She was not in the least afraid of her father's anger now. She had been so tortured by dim and shadowy apprehensions, that her spirits rebounded suddenly now that she was by her father's side, and she was bold enough to defy him.

"I shan't leave you any more to-night, papa. If you had all the business of the Stock Exchange to transact, I wouldn't let you sit up any longer, ruining your health by brooding over those tiresome papers. Besides, your desk is quite clear; you seem to have done everything."

"No, I have not done everything."

Mr. Hillary had resumed his seat, and was staring absently at the desk before him, where all things looked so neat and orderly that Maude seemed justified in thinking that her father's work was done. There was a row of drawers on each side of the desk. One of them was open, and a bunch of keys hung from the lock. A copy of the *Times* newspaper lay across the top of this open drawer; but as Miss Hillary hung about her father, some portion of the silken flounces or furbelows of her dress brushed against the paper, and it fell rustling to the ground. Lionel Hillary turned suddenly with a look of alarm directed towards the open drawer, and Maude, following his glance, saw something lying among the neat packets of letters and papers,—something which had no business to be there; something which seemed to realize a greater terror than any that her fancy had shaped, however dimly, during those hours of weary waiting in the room above.

The object which seemed so terrible to Maude Hillary was a pistol—a small pistol, of very modern fashion, fresh and bright from the hands of the gunmaker. Mr. Hillary was not a man who affected the gunsmith's art, and Maude had never seen such a weapon in her father's possession until to-night;—until this night, when vague fears respecting him had been so long busy in her brain, only wanting a form into which to shape themselves.

It seemed as if her frivolous girlhood left her all at once. It seemed as if that great terror, coming upon her with such ghastly suddenness, transformed her into a woman—a woman possessed of woman's highest attributes, fortitude, and self-abnegation. She uttered no cry of alarm, no exclamation of surprise; but she suddenly closed and locked the drawer in which the pistol lay, and dropped the bunch of keys into her pocket. Then kneeling down beside her father's chair, she put her arms tenderly about him, and laid her head upon his breast. Mr. Hillary had grown very passive all at once, and sat idly staring at the table before him.

"Papa," Maude said presently, in a low, pleading voice, "what is it? tell me, confide in me. In whom should you trust, if not in me? What is it, papa? what does it mean?"

"It means—ruin!" the merchant answered, huskily. He did not turn towards his daughter, but still sat staring blankly straight before him. "It means failure and ruin, Maude; ruin in its worst shape, its most hideous shape."

"You mean that we shall be poor, very poor—that we shall have to leave Twickenham—that you will be a clerk perhaps in some office, and I a daily governess. I remember when the Gordons failed, and poor Constance Gordon and her brothers had to begin the world afresh, without money, and with very little help from their old friends. Do you think I could not bear as much as that, and be happy still, if you were with me? Ah, papa, papa, do I seem to you such a helpless, useless creature, that you shrink from trusting me at such a time as this?" Hysterical sobs rose in her throat, but she stifled them, and went on talking to him in the same quiet tender voice, and caressing him as she talked. He submitted passively enough to her caresses, but he seemed scarcely conscious of them.

"Trust me, papa; tell me everything. Such troubles as these seem so much less dreadful when once they have been freely spoken of. I remember how Mr. Gordon kept everything hidden from his family as long as he could; and Constance told me that it seemed as if a great cloud was hanging over the house, and there was something in the atmosphere that stifled them all. But when the crash came at last, they bore it bravely; and see how well they have got on ever since, in a moderate way. Ah, papa, you have brought me up like a spoiled child, or a princess in a fairy tale; and now that trouble has come to us, you think I can't bear it. But I *can*, papa; if you will only be brave, your foolish, extravagant daughter will learn to be wise and patient. I was getting very tired of Twickenham, papa; and shall be as happy as the day is long in a nice little cottage in some cheap suburb, where I can have pupils."

Lionel Hillary ought no doubt to have been comforted by his daughter's tenderness; but unhappily there are some wounds so cruelly inflamed, that the gentlest application the surgeon can devise is apt to chafe and irritate them. The girl's talk jarred upon the merchant's mind, and it was with a shiver of pain that he turned to her as she left off speaking.

"Child, child!" he exclaimed, fretfully, "you don't know what you're talking of. Do you think it is such an easy thing to pass from one of the first positions in the City to a clerkship and a cottage in the suburbs? Do you think there is nothing between such opposite conditions? Do you suppose I have

only to shut up my books, and wish my creditors good morning, before I walk out of my office ! You talk and think like a child, Maude. It is all very well for an old twaddler like John Gordon, who suspends payment upon the first failure that affects his stability, and who winds up his affairs with a dividend of fifteen shillings in the pound, and the compliments and sympathy of all Basinghall Street. No one will sympathize with *my* fall, though more than I can count will suffer with me. I am not a man to drop under the first blow, Maude; for nearly three years I have been working a rotten ship, with the knowledge that nothing short of a miracle could save me from wreck. The wreck has come. The world will call me a dishonest man, because I waited for that miracle. I waited as the gambler waits at the green table, hoping that the last risk would bring me salvation. With me ruin means disgrace. I tell you, Maude, before the month is out, there will be a panic in the City, and men will cry out that Lionel Hillary is a rogue and a swindler. There's not a man who ever dined at Twickenham that won't use his knowledge of my home as a weapon against me. There's not a bottle of wine I ever gave a friend whose price and quality will not be made a reproach against me. Oh ! I know how people talk about these things. Go away, child ! Your presence only goads and irritates me. It reminds me that I might have done better than I have done; I might have been wiser, I might have saved something—my good name at least. I have loved you so dearly, Maude,—Heaven only knows how dearly, for I am no man of big words or sentimental phrases. And now I leave you utterly destitute, the pauper child of a disgraced father."

"But you shall not leave me," cried Maude, with a sudden energy that startled Lionel Hillary. "Papa, why do you insist upon treating me as a child ? Why do you judge me by what I have been, rather than by what I can be ? Why won't you trust me ? why won't you talk to me as if I were a son, and had a right to share your secrets ? You have told me the worst, and you see I can bear to know it. I can endure even disgrace : but I cannot bear to lose you. Trust me, papa. I will be patient under any calamity except—" She was seized with a sudden shivering, and clung to him with a convulsive force in the small hands that entwined themselves about his arm. "You know what I mean, papa," she said. "Believe that I can bear anything if you will be true and brave and patient. And even yet the miracle may come. Something may happen at the very last, surely it may, to save your good name."

Mr. Hillary pressed his daughter's hand in acknowledgment of so much tenderness and devotion ; but he shook his head moodily as he answered her, "Nothing *can* happen to save me,

unless twenty thousand pounds drop from the skies between this and the 10th of January."

Twenty thousand pounds! Maude's thoughts flew to her jewel-case, in obedience to the most universal of feminine instincts. Twenty thousand pounds! Alas for that birthday gift of opals and diamonds, the turquoise rings and bracelets, the emerald cross, the delicate pink coral, and all the fragile fantastic toys of gold and enamel, bought in the dearest market of elegant West-end dealers, who give three years' credit. Maude, in all her ignorance, was wise enough to know that these things would not realize one of the twenty thousands required by her father.

"But there is Twickenham, papa," she said; "the Cedars must be worth ever so many thousands."

"And is mortgaged to the full extent of its value," answered Mr. Hillary. "Find me twenty thousand pounds, if you can, Maude; but don't worry me with frivolous suggestions. I tell you that it is quite impossible for a woman to understand my position. God help me! I scarcely understand it myself. I only know that everything round me is so much rottenness, and that the crash *must* come next month."

"But you will not think—of that—again!" urged Maude, pointing to the drawer.

"No; I'll wait to the tenth."

"For *my* sake; Oh, papa, for *my* sake!"

"No, child; not for your sake, but from a selfish, cowardly clinging to life," cried Lionel Hillary, with sudden passion. "It would be better for you, ten times better, if I were dead. The thought of that was in my mind as I came down here to-night, until the noise of the engine almost seemed to thump out the words, 'Better for her, better for her.' People would have mercy upon you if I were dead, Maude; even those who suffered by me would be less bitter in their reproaches if I were dead. A man can only break his heart once; and when the man is dead, there is no mark for the arrows of justifiable reproach, or the foul garden-stuff and rotten eggs of malicious calumny."

"Papa, the help may come; the twenty thousand pounds may be found."

"No, child; there was only one hope of that, and the hope is gone."

For the first time that night Mr. Hillary looked at his daughter; she saw the look, an anxious scrutiny that sent a chill through her heart. She did not ask him what that one hope had been.

"Papa, trust in me, only trust in me!" she cried; "you do not know of what I am capable for your sake—for your sake. You don't know what I have suffered to-night, and how changed

I am by that suffering. Hope for a miracle even, papa: keep things as smooth as you can, and between this and the tenth the twenty thousand pounds may be found. Only tell me one thing. You don't want anyone to *give* you the money. If it were lent to you, you could repay it by-and-by?"

"Yes; with sufficient time I could repay it."

"Then hope for the miracle, papa. Ah! you think me such a child that you are almost angry with me for telling you to hope; but the lion laughed at the mouse, I dare say."

Five minutes after this, Miss Hillary led her father to his room, and wished him good night, cheerfully enough, upon the threshold. But under that pretence of cheerfulness, cruel fears and perplexities were torturing her innocent heart. Ruin, dis-honour, disgrace; the misery of many homes besides that one household on the bank of the river,—all these terrors had come very suddenly upon the girl who only that morning had been impatient of the December weather and the dull gray sky.

She went to her room; but only to sit with the door open, listening for any sound in her father's apartment, which was next her own. She sat for nearly two hours shivering with cold, and then crept softly to her father's room and opened the door. The merchant was sleeping, peacefully enough to all appearance, for his breathing was tranquil and regular; so Maude went back to her room. It seemed the bitterest mockery to go to bed; but then Miss Hillary's maid would have been scandalized had she come at eight o'clock and found her mistress still watching. Alas, poor Maude; for the first time in her life she had to submit to that most cruel social penance, entitled "keeping up appearances." She went to bed; and though she seemed to hear every hour, and half-hour, and quarter of an hour chimed by the church clocks, she must have slept at some time or other in that brief remainder of the night, or else how should she have been tormented by those hideous dreams, in which she was always wading through black morasses and turgid waters, carrying in her arms a great bag of gold, which she vainly strove to convey to her father?

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### A DRAMA THAT WAS ACTED BEHIND THE SCENES.

MR. HILLARY escorted his daughter and Julia Desmond back to Twickenham upon the day following that night-scene of anguish and terror. They left Brighton rather late in the day, and arrived at the Cedars when the early winter evening had closed in upon the leafless avenues and groves about the old house. Lights were burning cheerily in the long range of lower

windows, and in the vestibule and inner hall; and rare groups of stainless marble gleamed white against a background of bright hothouse flowers. Deferential servants came hurrying out as the carriage drove up; and Miss Hillary, seeing her home in all its accustomed brightness and comfort, felt a painful sense of bewilderment. It was so difficult to realize the force of that calamity which had been so lately revealed to her: it was so difficult to believe that all this splendour was so much rottenness, from which there was only one step to poverty and disgrace.

Mr. Hillary had visited his daughter's room very early upon the morning after the terrible confidence between them, and had impressed upon her the necessity of suppressing every evidence of the knowledge that had come to her.

"I have been compelled to trust you, Maude," he said; "and you must prove yourself worthy of my confidence. Heaven only knows how difficult it has been for me to keep the secrets of my business during three years of reverses and misfortunes such as rarely fall to the lot of a speculator. My only chance of floating over this crisis lies in the meeting with some friend who will lend me the money I want, without looking too closely into the nature of the security I have to offer. But let the state of my affairs once get wind, and all hope of retrieval would be lost. Remember this, Maude: and, if you love me, show a bright face to the world; and above all, beware of Julia Desmond. That young lady is a dangerous person, my dear; and the day may come when we shall have reason to regret having given a shelter to old Desmond's destitute child."

"But Julia is a dear good girl, papa; she would be very sorry for us, I am sure," Maude pleaded, innocently.

"Julia has contrived to feather her own nest so remarkably well, that she would be very indifferent to any calamity that could come to her friends," answered the practical man of the world, who had been by no means pleased with Miss Desmond since that young lady's conquest of Francis Tredethlyn.

Maude kissed her father,—ah, how passionately! She clung to him, as she remembered that long feverish dream of the previous night, and the glittering something lying in the drawer; she kissed him, and promised that his secrets should be guarded more carefully than her own life.

"And the miracle *may* be accomplished between this and the tenth of January, papa," she said.

And then, as Lionel Hillary was about to leave his daughter's room, she placed herself suddenly between him and the door, and turned the key in the lock. He looked at her, surprised and perplexed.

"Maude!"

"Dearest father, you have trusted me, and you have exacted

a promise from me," said Miss Hillary, with a quiet calmness that was more impressive than any vehemence of manner; "and now I want you to give me a promise, a very solemn promise, my own dear father."

She put her hand upon his shoulder and kissed him once more, clinging to him fondly, looking tenderly upward to his pale careworn face. Then she took a bunch of keys from her pocket and held them out before him.

"You remember those keys, papa; I am going to return them to you; but I want you to kneel down with me here, now, when all that feverish excitement of last night has passed away; I want you to promise me, as you hope for mercy and happiness in a better world when this life is all gone by and done with,—I want you to promise me that you will never again under any circumstances, in any hour of trial or temptation, think of that dreadful alternative of which you thought last night. Oh, papa! remember it is such a terrible sin even to think of it; for we can never do so until we have ceased to trust in God."

The simple words went straight to Lionel Hillary's heart—that world-weary heart, in which there was but this one tender quality of paternal love still left. No subtle arguments of theologian or philosopher could have so deeply influenced him as his daughter's gentle pleading. He knelt by her side, close to a little table, on which an open Testament was lying, and pressing his lips upon the sacred page swore that he would never again contemplate the sin which he had so nearly committed only a few hours before.

"It is a coward's remedy at the best," he said presently; and then he took his daughter in his arms and looked down at her tearful face with a mist before his own eyes, which made that bright young beauty seem blotted and dim. "My Maude, my darling, surely Heaven must have created you to be my guardian angel. I have not been a good man; I have been too much of a speculator for the last few years,—a reckless speculator, perhaps; but when the demon of commercial hazard had his grip strongest upon me, your image was always in my mind. I wanted to leave you rich, secure from all the troubles of this world. I was a poor man in my young days, Maude; and perhaps the bitterness of that early time may have taught me to set too high a value upon wealth. Fortune came to me afterwards, almost as wonderfully as it comes to a prince in a fairy tale; and some recklessness of spirit may have been engendered in me by my own successes and by the times in which I have lived."

"But, dear papa, you need not fear poverty for my sake," said Maude; "only trust in me, and when the time comes you shall find me ready to face it. My life has been very pleasant

—too pleasant, I dare say,—I have always felt that it was so when the thought has come to me of all the people who suffer in this world. But you know how the princess in the fairy tale, who has never known a sorrow, goes out all at once into the great forest, more helpless and lonely than the poorest woodman's daughter, and yet no harm ever comes to the princess, papa. If it will only please Heaven to spare your good name, poverty will have no sting for me; and if disgrace *should* come, I will bear it for your sake,—I will bear it without a murmur for your sake, papa.”

She broke down just a little as she said this; she could not speak quite calmly of that most terrible loss of all—the loss of her father's commercial honour. She remembered, very dimly, long prosy discussions that she had heard at Mr. Hillary's dinner-table, about men who had failed, and who had failed through some dishonesty or recklessness of their own, and whose downfall had involved the hard-won fortunes of others, making a vast circle of ruin, spreading as the watery circle spreads when you drop a pebble into a tideless lake.

From this time it almost seemed as if a new life began for Maude Hillary. No more careless idling over new music, no more eager commencements of expensive fancy-work that was never to be finished! After Miss Hillary's return to the Cedars, anyone taking the trouble to watch her closely might have perceived a wonderful alteration in her conduct—a change that was almost a transformation in her very nature. When she opened her piano now, it was for no idle trifling with fashionable difficulties, no coquetting with shakes, and skipping of arpeggios. She practised steadily, and for hours together. Might not the time be very near at hand in which she would be called upon to gird on her armour, and join the ranks of the bread-winners? She thought of herself in a dingy London street, somewhere in the dreary region between Holborn and the New Road—the region which was once a fair expanse of pleasant meadow-land. She thought of herself toiling as so many women toiled, leading the same dull life from day to day; and her courage did not fail her even before that dismal picture. It was not likely that this change in Maude Hillary could escape the notice of so observant a young lady as Miss Desmond. Julia saw and wondered, but she was far from guessing the real cause of Maude's unusual gravity.

“I suppose she is making herself unhappy about Harcourt Lowther,” thought Miss Desmond. “These fortunate people always contrive to find *one* crumpled leaf in their beds of roses. She is making herself miserable about that handsome, worthless soldier, and she thinks herself hardly used because she cannot play at love in a cottage, with a rich mercantile father to pay the expenses of the idyllic *ménage*.”

This was how Julia Desmond accounted for Maude's long intervals of absent brooding, and that melancholy shadow which settled on her face whenever she fancied herself unnoticed, and for a while relaxed the heroic effort with which she tried to keep her promise, and guard her father's secret. It was a very hard struggle. All the young idlers, the government clerks, the briefless but literary barristers, the rising artists who had narrowly escaped making palpable hits at the Royal Academy, or at a temple of art which they irreverently alluded to as the "British Inst," all the accustomed Twickenham loungers flocked down to the Cedars to keep their Christmas holidays in the house of a gentleman whom they regarded as a sort of commercial Midas—a Moorgate Street Fortunatus, from whose inexhaustible coffers flowed the golden waters of perpetual prosperity: and Maude received all the old incense, and was fain to smile something like the old smiles upon her worshippers; while her heart ached with an unceasing pain, and a hidden dread that was like a palpable burden weighed for ever on her breast.

"Oh, if they knew—if they only knew!" she thought. "They court me because they think I am rich, perhaps; but if they only knew what an imposture all this splendour is—these lights and flowers, and grapes and pines, and Sèvres china and Venetian glass, and all this long parade of dinner! if they knew that poverty and disgrace may come to us before the new year has well begun!" Sometimes, in her utter weariness of spirit, sometimes when the social comedy seemed almost too hard to act, Miss Hillary felt suddenly tempted to turn round upon her admirers, and cry to them,—

"Why do you torment me with your hackneyed compliments? I am *not* the daughter of a millionaire; my father is only an imprudent speculator, who is hovering on the verge of a black abyss of bankruptcy and ruin. Go and offer your worship in some solvent temple, and leave me alone with my father and his sorrows."

This, or something akin to this, Miss Hillary was at times sorely tempted to utter. But she kept her promise. She had promised that no word or action of hers should betray the rottenness of her father's position, and she kept a close watch upon herself. Her adorers—who were by no means so mercenary as she thought them—perceived that something was amiss with their goddess; but were far from associating anything so vulgar as the state of the money-market with the lessened lustre of her smiles.

"She's engaged to some fellow in the army, and her father won't let her marry him, and the fellow writes her worrying letters; Miss Desmond told me as much," the loungers said one to another, when confiding in each other about Miss Hillary.

The brilliant Julia had taken care to let Maude's admirers know that her heart had long been bestowed upon a remote object; but she did not go so far as to reveal the name of Miss Hillary's chosen lover; and Francis Tredethlyn had no suspicion that Maude Hillary and the beautiful heiress of whom his master had so often spoken were one and the same person. He knew nothing of this; he only knew that Maude seemed as remote from his sphere as the distant stars that shone coldly upon him out of a steel-blue winter sky when he looked from his window at the Cedars. He spent his Christmas at the Cedars; for Mr Hillary had been specially cordial and hospitable to him of late, and had resumed all his old graciousness of manner to Julia.

And the private theatricals, the elegant drawing-room exhibition of amateur histrionics, which Maude had planned so merrily in the autumn, were to take place on the first night of the new year—now, when the poor girl's heart was sinking under the dull pain of that perpetual burden, that dreary terror of the disgrace which might be so near.

She had told her father that a miracle might be wrought before the 10th of January. Of what had she thought or dreamed when she held out that hope? What daring fancy had been engendered out of the excitement of the moment? There are times when a woman feels capable of becoming a social Joan of Arc, a bloodless Charlotte Corday; but then the enthusiasm, the exaltation of the moment is so apt to pass *with* the moment. There had been a vague but desperate intention lurking in Maude Hillary's mind when she had encouraged her father by those hopeful speeches; but the days were creeping ~~past~~, the new year was close at hand, and nothing had been done. Nothing had been done; and now Miss Hillary was tormented all day long about these wonderful private theatricals, which were to surpass every drawing-room performance since the days when the unhappy daughter of the Cæsars played a *soubrette* for the delight of that taciturn king and grandfather-in-law who did not like to laugh.

All arrangements for the grand entertainment had been made before Mr. Hillary's household removed to Brighton. The play had been selected, the characters allotted to the individuals who were supposed, or who supposed themselves, to be most fitted to play them; but not without as much shuffling and changing as the kings and queens undergo in a game of cards. The drama finally chosen was the "Lady of Lyons," selected, no doubt, on that grand principle in accordance with which all amateurs go to work, *i. e.* because it is a play which specially requires accomplished actors in every one of its characters. Of course Maude was to be the *Pauline*. Was she not sole daughter and heiress of the master of the house, at

whose expense all the business was to take place? If she had been red-haired, or hump-backed, or lame, the amateurs could scarcely have done otherwise than choose her as the representative of the lovely *Mademoiselle Deschappelles*. But as she was one of the fairest daughters ever spoiled by a wealthy merchant, she was really created for the part, as it seemed; and she had only to order her dresses and let down her sunny hair in the classic disorder of the period, and she would be the loveliest *Pauline* that ever won the simple heart of an aspiring young gardener. But how about *Claude*? At first every one of the amateurs had desired to play *Claude*, and nothing but *Claude*. To wear that impossible velvet coat, with its lavish embroidery of gold and spangles; to snub *Beauseant*, and to patronize *Damas*; to flourish diamond snuff-boxes and rings, and filmy ruffles of point d'Alençon, which are so becoming to the unhappy amateur, whose hands are apt to assume the rich purple hues of raw beef under the influence of extreme terror; to hold Miss Hillary in their arms, and cry, "Oh, rapture!" in a ponderous bass voice apparently situated somewhere in those martial jack-boots, without which *Claude* would be less than *Claude*,—to do all this seemed to the young men at the Cedars a glory and delight which would be cheaply won by the cutting of one another's throats in a *champ clos*.

And then to what base hypocrisies these amateur actors descended! declaring to one another that, after all, *Claude* was not such a great part! Nay, indeed, was not the heroic gardener something of a spoon, liable to provoke laughter if his velvet coat failed to fit, or his humble blouse looked too much like a little boy's pinafore? *Claude* might be a very fine part, the amateurs argued to each other, in a regular theatre, where there were the gallery fellows to applaud the long speeches, and to stamp their hob-nailed boots in the great situations, and all that sort of thing, you know; but your drawing-room audiences are apt to laugh at strong sentiment; and, in short, for a private performance, *Damas*, or *Beauseant*, or *Glavis* were the great parts.

So there was a good deal of chopping and changing, with vengeful feelings attendant thereupon; and at last, after almost all the privileged guests at the Cedars had made themselves hoarse in the endeavour to cultivate that bass voice and peculiar melodious gurgle so often heard on the stage, and so rarely heard off it; after innumerable tryings-on of velvet coats and cocked hats before cheval-glasses,—it transpired all at once that nobody wanted to play *Claude Melnotte*. The noblest hearts sank with a sickly terror before the thought of all Twickenham assembled in solemn conclave to listen to those long speeches with which the peasant husband endeavours to appease the

natural anger of his bride. One by one the amateurs had made the awful discovery, that after all there is some touch of art, not to be learned in a day, even in the actor's trade. One by one they had discovered that they lacked *physique* for the leading character; and that, after three acts or so of blank verse, they were apt to become hoarse and roopy, and to break ignominiously from that melodious bass gurgle into a treble squeak. So it came about that there was no one to play *Claude*, and Miss Hillary clasped her hands in anguish, and demanded what was to become of her. All Twickenham and Hampton Court, Richmond and Ham, and all sorts of people from town invited to witness the "Lady of Lyons," and no *Claude Melnotte*! One of the government clerks, who fancied himself an embryo Buckstone, timidly suggested "Box and Cox" as a fitting substitute for the drama; but Miss Hillary turned from him with disdain. "Box and Cox!" she exclaimed, contemptuously; "why, my dresses are all ordered, and the white satin for the wedding-dress is to be five-and-twenty shillings a yard. I must have some one for *Claude*."

And then at last it was discovered that Francis Tredethlyn, who had volunteered to carry a tea-tray or a coal-scuttle, or to announce a carriage, or to perform any ignominious part in the drama for Miss Hillary's pleasure,—it was discovered all at once that this young man was able to act. He was no untaught Macready, no ready-made Kean; but he was able to do what the best of the government clerks and literary barristers failed in doing; he was able to roll out the melodious blank verse in a big, deep voice, that never failed him to the end of the chapter. The stage is almost as great a leveller as death himself, and on that little platform at Twickenham uneducated Francis Tredethlyn was quite as much at his ease as the well-bred young men about him: more at his ease, for he was not so bent upon distinguishing himself, and was indeed only eager to oblige Miss Hillary. All this had happened before the autumn visit to Brighton; and now when Maude returned to the Cedars she found busy workmen making a perpetual hammering in the apartment which had been chosen for the scene of the entertainment. Mr. Hillary did everything in a superb manner; there was to be no pitiful contrivance of folding-doors festooned by suburban carpenters, but accomplished people from town had come down to the Cedars, and a magnificent archway of white and gold spanned the lofty billiard-room which the merchant had built at one end of his house. All the arrangements were to be perfection; the lighting of the small stage was to be a miracle of art; the grouping of the furniture had been studied by *genre* painters of no mean pretensions. Poor Maude grew sick at heart as she heard all these details discussed. She looked

back, and wondered, as she remembered what a frivolous creature she had been only a few months ago, and how this amateur dramatic performance had seemed a matter of supreme importance to her; and now she repeated the words mechanically during those long rehearsals, in the course of which the amateurs had so many angry disputations, and so cruelly victimized Mr. Hillary's pale sherry.

At last the new year began, and at ten o'clock upon the first night in January long lines of carriages filled the avenue at the Cedars, and the road outside the lodge-gates, until the neighbourhood was luminous with flaring lamps that glared redly in the winter darkness. People came from far and wide to see Miss Hillary play *Pauline*, and to devour Mr. Gunter's supper, though Miss Hillary's heart might be breaking, and the merchant's head splitting with the weight of care that pressed just now upon his overtaxed brain! But people *do* get through these things somehow; and Lionel Hillary walked about his drawing-rooms, looking supremely gentlemanly in a stiff cambric cravat, and uttering mild commonplaces for the edification of new arrivals.

People get through these things. Poor Maude's head ached with a dull pain as her maid arrayed her in a dress of white silk, showered with rosebuds, and flounced and looped with lace and ribbon. Would any of this finery be paid for, Miss Hillary wondered, as she saw her splendour reflected in the cheval-glass; or was it altogether dishonesty and wickedness? She shuddered as she thought of this: but the entertainment of to-night was only a part of the grand hypocrisy which might help to float Mr. Hillary safely over the terrible crisis, and Maude determined to be true to her promise. So she smiled at Julia Desmond, when that young lady, who was to play *Madame Deschappelles*, came to exhibit herself in powder and patches, and brocade and diamonds, and with half the point-lace in South Audley Street bestowed upon her handsome person. Miss Desmond had consented with amazing graciousness to perform the matronly rôle allotted to her; but she had determined to look like a marquise of the time of Louis Quinze, and she had despatched Francis Tredethlyn on half-a-dozen shopping expeditions, until that gentleman was fain to wonder how a few ribbons, brocaded fabrics, and yellow old lace flounces, could cost the big sums for which he wrote cheques in favour of the West-end tradesmen to whom Julia sent him.

The two girls admired each other's dresses, and the maid joined in a perfect chorus of laudations with the young lady who *would* play the *Widow Melnotte* in a nine-guinea black moire antique, and a point-lace cap and apron, and who kept snatching a manuscript copy of her part from her pocket, and

furtively gabbling its contents in dark corners. The girls admired each other, and sailed down the broad staircase together, and then went straight to a little ante-room, where half-a-dozen gentlemen, in attitudes expressive of supreme mental agony, were bending over half-a-dozen copies of the "Lady of Lyons," and gabbling vehemently.

There is no occasion to describe this amateur performance at the Cedars, inasmuch as it very closely resembled all other amateur performances. Miss Hillary, stepping on to a stage for the first time, was, to say the least, not *quite* a Helen Faucit, and was on the point of breaking down now and then in some of her grand speeches; but she looked so beautiful in her perplexity and confusion, that the elegant audience encouraged and supported her by the gentlest tappings of spangled fans and pattings of tight kid gloves. There were no tiresome boys in the gallery to urge her to speak up; no critical chimney-sweeps to murmur their disapproval, or hint that she had better go home and learn her part. There was only admiration for her timid loveliness, and the soft music of her tremulous voice.

Of course there were the usual number of dead pauses in the drama, technically known as "stage-waits," the solemn silences in which the actors stood still and looked imploringly at one another, while the voices of amateur prompters—always inciting their victims to the utterance of long speeches—were painfully audible throughout the assemblage. Mr. Tredethlyn rolled out his blank verse with a sturdy courage that was worthy of all praise; and if his hands were a little red, and his blue-cotton blouse slightly suggestive of Newgate Market, he had acted with his brother soldiers in very rough amateur performances out in Van Diemen's Land, and now and then some touch of natural fire, some little bit of tender pathos, startled the well-bred audience into applause. It may be that now and then Francis Tredethlyn found himself carried away by the spirit of the scene. Did not that romantic drama bear some likeness to his own story? This beautiful *Pauline*, this unapproachable being whose lovely image filled the peasant's dreams, who was she but Maude Hillary herself? Perhaps if Miss Desmond had been the *Pauline*, Francis might have seemed as cold and tame as the rest of the Twickenham amateurs: but the eyes that looked at him tenderly or reproachfully to-night, were the only eyes in all the world that had the power to move him deeply. He acted well, therefore, as the dullest man will act sometimes under the influence of some factitious excitement: and when the curtain fell upon the final scene of happy and triumphant love, the audience were loud in their praise of "that handsome-looking Mr. Tredethlyn, who was just the very man for *Claude Melnotte*."

Then there was a final parting of the curtains and a shower

of bouquets, all in the orthodox style, and Maude felt perfumed petals fluttering about her as she curtseyed to her indulgent audience.

All through that last act she had surprised those well-bred spectators out of their natural languor. The *Pauline* who had been so tame and unimpassioned in the grand cottage scene, was carried away by a strong tide of passionate feeling in that last act, where the half broken-hearted daughter pleads for her insolvent father. Sobs almost choked Miss Hillary's utterance more than once in this scene; and when at last her head lay for a few moments on Francis Tredethlyn's breast, the young man's martial decorations were wet with real tears. The sight of that emotion moved him strangely, though he beheld in it nothing more than the natural excitement of a highly sensitive organization. After the little ovation that came with the close of the drama, he followed Maude Hillary into the ante-room, where the rest of the amateurs were discussing the night's business, and flirting with the splendid Julia, and thence to an inner room, less brilliantly lighted, and quite unoccupied. Beyond this inner room there was another apartment—the study in which Francis had fallen an easy victim to the wiles of the Hibernian enchantress—and it was to this room that Maude hurried, still followed by Mr. Tredethlyn.

He had no business to follow her. He knew that very well. His business was with Julia, who had acted *Madame Deschapelles* with wonderful spirit, and for whom the evening had been one long triumph, inasmuch as her lace, and diamonds, and brocade, and dark eyes, and white teeth, had been the subjects of universal admiration. Mr. Tredethlyn's business lay in that brilliantly-lighted ante-chamber where Julia sat amongst the government clerks, and barristers, and grand military dandies, while an accompaniment of perpetually popping champagne-corks mingled pleasantly with the noise of their laughter. He knew this, and yet he followed Maude to the dimly-lighted study, where the red glow of the fire flickered on the bindings of the books and the frames of the pictures. He could not leave off being *Claude Melnotte* all in a moment. The exaltation of the mimic scene was still upon him. Just now he had been carried quite away by the influence of the poetic situation; and when he flung down the sham money, which was to release the merchant's daughter from her hated suitor, a warmer thrill of triumph had stirred his breast than had ever been engendered by the possession of Oliver Tredethlyn's thousands.

And now he could not fall back to his old position all at once. Only a minute or two ago Maude Hillary had been sobbing on his breast,—his bride, his wife; and he half fancied he had some kind of right to sympathize with her emotion. He stopped

suddenly on the threshold of the study, quite unmanned by the sight of Mr. Hillary's daughter, half kneeling, half lying on the ground, with her face buried in the cushions of a sofa, and her hands clasped in a despairing attitude above the fair tangled hair that had so lately lain upon his breast. Her whole frame was shaken by the vehemence of her sobs; and before such a picture as this it was scarcely strange if poor country-bred Francis Tredethlyn quite forgot that he was *not* Claude Melnotte. He bent over the prostrate girl, and laid his big fingers gently upon one of those little bejewelled hands clasped so convulsively above the fair head.

"Miss Hillary," he exclaimed, "dear Miss Hillary, for pity's sake, tell me what distresses you—what has happened—what is wrong—or—I—I beg your pardon—you have over-fatigued yourself, and you are hysterical; let me send for your maid."

"Oh, no, no, no!" cried the girl, rising to her feet, and standing before him, but with her face still hidden from him, hidden by her outspread hands and her dishevelled hair.

"Shall I call Julia? she is in the room yonder."

"Oh, no! I—I want to speak to you, Mr. Tredethlyn; stay just a little, please. Ah! it is so hard, so cruel, but the last chance! In all the world there is no one else who can save me—and my father—my poor, miserable, bankrupt father!"

Francis looked at Miss Hillary in complete bewilderment. Her father—her bankrupt father! Why, then she was still thinking of the scene that was just finished, and the commercial troubles of Monsieur Deschappelles; which character, by the way, had been enacted by a very young man of a sickly cast of countenance, and an inclination to hang his head dejectedly throughout the performance of the drama. It is a rule amongst amateurs to assign the elderly and ineligible characters to the youngest and meekest members of the company; whereby Monsieur Deschappelles is usually represented as a young person of some nineteen summers, with flour in his hair, dirty streaks, supposed to represent wrinkles, upon his face, and a tendency to squeakiness in his voice.

"I am sure you are over-fatigued, over-excited by the play," urged Francis; "do let me call Julia."

"No!" cried Miss Hillary, dropping her hands from before her face. "Oh, Mr. Tredethlyn," she exclaimed, almost passionately, "can't you understand—can't you see that I am in earnest? Do you think that scene just now would have made me cry as it did, if it had not reminded me of my own sorrow? Mr. Tredethlyn—I—I know you are a good man, that you would not be slow to do a kindness for anyone who needed your help; I know that; and I—I thought I should have courage to speak to you, but now the words won't come—I——"

Her dry lips moved, but made no sound. She clasped her hands once more before her face. Heaven knows how desperate was the effort that she made. It is not such an easy matter to borrow twenty thousand pounds; even though the borrower may be young and beautiful, and accustomed to perpetual adoration.

"Miss Hillary, you speak of help—needing help—from *me*. For mercy's sake, tell me how I can help you. Do you think there is anything upon earth that would give me such pride and delight as to be of service to you?"

The enthusiasm of the moment lighted up Francis Tredethlyn's countenance like a sudden glow of summer sunshine. Maude uncovered her face and looked at him, and saw at once that her cause was gained; her father's preserver was found. She had not counted in vain upon Francis Tredethlyn.

"I want you to lend papa twenty thousand pounds," she said; "I know that he will repay you honourably. He has some difficulties—terrible difficulties in his business,—but the loan of twenty thousand pounds would smooth them all away. I know that you are very, very rich, Mr. Tredethlyn, and that you can afford to lend such a sum of money, or I should never have dared——"

"You would not have dared, Miss Hillary? Oh, can you doubt that I would give the last sixpence I have in the world, the last drop of my heart's-blood, to save you from one pang? Twenty thousand pounds! Take forty—fifty thousand—the utmost farthing of my fortune, if you will; squander it—throw it into the river yonder, if the waste of it can give you a moment's pleasure. Oh, you don't know, you don't know how I love you!"

He had been acting *Claude Melnotte*, and the intoxication of the sweet sentimental poetry was strong upon him; beyond which it is just possible that he may have taken a little more sparkling Moselle in the course of his dramatic exertions than can safely be taken by a young man of sanguine temperament. All prudence, all power of reticence, left him in that moment, and he dropped on his knees at Miss Hillary's feet, like a lover in a stage-play. She was so beautiful—she seemed so far away from him even now, when her distress had brought her a little nearer than of old,—that this attitude of adoration seemed quite natural to him, almost the only attitude in which he dared address her.

"Oh, if you knew how I love you," he cried, passionately,—"if you could only believe or understand! But I am so ignorant—so unworthy—so far beneath you!"

Miss Hillary drew herself away from him with a gesture of mingled surprise and disgust.

" You dare to talk to me like this, and you are the affianced husband of my friend!" she cried. " O, Mr. Tredethlyn, you take a very mean advantage of my father's difficulties and my distress."

" Yes!" answered Julia Desmond from the doorway. She had been standing on the threshold for the last few moments, watching this interview behind the scenes. " Yes! it is altogether mean and shameful, Maude Hillary. You have taken a noble course, I think, when you fling your father's debts upon the man who was to be my husband, and coolly ask him for the trifling loan of twenty thousand pounds." She laughed bitterly as she named the sum. " Twenty thousand pounds—and you ask your friend's lover to turn money-lender; and you bring your tears and hysterical sobs, and a thousand pretty amateur dramatic devices to bear, in order to obtain what you want, and all in the most childish innocence, of course. And then you turn upon the man whom you have lured to your feet by a hundred tricks and artifices, and make a charming show of surprise and indignation. Ah! it is shameful, Maude Hillary—mean and cruel and false; and bitter shame shall come to you for this night's work."

The Irishwoman was superb in her indignation. Those flashing eyes and glittering teeth, hereditary in the race of the Desmonds, seemed to light her face with an infernal kind of splendour: such a splendour had many a fated victim seen upon the countenance of the duelling Irish colonel, just before he fell prone on some lonely field beside the Shannon. It was against Maude that the fuller fury of Julia Desmond's rage was directed,—against Maude, of whom she had always been jealous, in whom she had continually found a triumphant rival. It was only after that outburst of jealous rage that Julia turned upon her recreant lover. Francis had risen from his knees, and stood a little way from the two girls, with a dogged moodiness upon his face: he was sobered by Maude's indignation and Julia's passion, and he was dimly aware that he had acted like a scoundrel.

" As for you, Mr. Francis Tredethlyn," Miss Desmond said presently, " I suppose I have no need to tell you that all is over between us, and that I bitterly repent the humiliation my own folly has brought upon me. I should have known how much I risked when I stooped to regard a person whose code of honour belongs to a different world from that in which I have been reared. I suppose amongst *your* people it is the fashion for a man to pledge himself to one woman and then make love to another; but such is *not* the custom in the circles where the Desmonds have been used to be welcome. I should have known what I had to expect when I came into

this house. I should have known what I had to anticipate when I trusted in the truth and loyalty of a man who is not a gentleman."

Throughout this speech Julia's hands had been moving rapidly, but with unfailing purpose, though they trembled a little all the while. One by one she had unfastened the diamond ornaments that had glittered upon her head and wrists, her throat and bosom; and now the jewels lay in a little heap at the feet of Francis Tredethlyn. One by one she had thrown them there during that passionate speech. She *could* not act her play out. She had been unable to support the character she had undertaken. The fiery blood of the Ryan O'Brien Desmond had asserted itself in spite of all the promptings of prudence, all the bitter schooling of experience. It was very dreadful to be poor and dependent; it would have been delightful to be mistress of thirty thousand a year: but Julia Desmond, coming to the threshold of the study, had heard Maude's appeal for the twenty thousand pounds, and Francis Tredethlyn's impassioned avowal; and patience and policy had alike deserted her. Carried away by the impulse of the moment, she renounced everything. At last Francis Tredethlyn spoke for himself.

"I know that I have acted very badly," he said. "I had no right to speak; I never should have spoken but for that play. I think I must have almost fancied myself that poor gardener's son, who dared to worship the brightest creature that ever crossed his pathway, and in an evil hour told her of his madness. Ah, forgive me, Miss Hillary; do not hate or despise me for what I said just now; let it pass like the play in which we acted to-night. And you, Julia—Miss Desmond, I am not too proud to ask your forgiveness for the wrong I have done you. I have been very guilty, and I accept your reproaches in all their bitterness. But when I promised to be your true and faithful husband, I only made a promise that I am still prepared to fulfil. You will at least do me the justice to remember that I did not profess any warmer feeling than admiration and esteem."

"Your justification is only a new insult, Mr. Tredethlyn," Julia answered, coldly. "I wish you good night."

Her passion had been something terrible in its suppressed vehemence some moments before; but she was quite calm now. She swept towards the door leading out into the corridor; but as she passed the merchant's daughter, she stopped, just long enough to utter one brief sentence close in the young lady's ear.

"You shall suffer for this, Miss Hillary," she said,—

She left the room; but Maude followed her, crying "Julia! Julia!"

She hurried along the corridor and up the staircase, following closely upon Miss Desmond; but when she reached that young lady's room, the door was shut in her face, and only one answer came to her almost piteous pleadings for admission,—

"I have nothing to say to you, Miss Hillary. I only regret that I must pass one more night in this house."

So Maude was obliged to go away in despair, and, meeting her maid at the door of her own room, was informed that Mr. Hillary had been inquiring for her, "ever so many times," the maid said; "and I've been looking for you everywhere, Miss, to know when you'd have your dress changed."

Yes, there was to be more changing of dresses before Maude's work was done. She resigned herself with a sigh to the hands of the young person who waited upon her; and then went downstairs, gorgeous in pink silk and crape puffings, and with a crown of dewy rosebuds on her head, to receive the compliments and congratulations of her father's friends, and to act her part in that social drama which was quite as difficult a performance as the "Lady of Lyons."

Francis Tredethlyn sat quite alone in the little dimly-lighted study at the end of the long, rambling mansion, while Mr. Hillary's guests finished the evening with a little dancing, a great deal of flirting, and a perpetual sipping of sparkling wines, in out-of-the-way corridors and lobbies, where there were hothouse flowers and low chintz-covered ottomans, and an air of loneliness conducive to flirtation. Francis Tredethlyn sat alone, with Julia's diamonds still lying at his feet, and brooded over his position. He had outraged Maude, whom he adored. He had injured Julia, to whom he was bound by every sentiment of honour and good faith. No words can express the bitterness of his remorse as he sat pondering upon what he had done. "False to my cousin Susan, false to Julia Desmond," he thought; "nothing but mischief has come to me since I inherited that miserable money. I have no right to be amongst these people. I never should have come to this house, where *her* presence has always seemed to turn my brain."

He looked down at the diamonds lying on the carpet, and smiled bitterly as he remembered how much money they represented,—more than had been spent on Susan Tredethlyn in all the girl's joyless life—ten times more than would have restored the young man's father to solvency and comfort, that time when his uncle refused him the loan of two hundred pounds.

He stooped and gathered together the fallen jewels. There was a writing-table near him, with pens, and paper, and sealing-wax, and all necessary implements. He selected a large sheet of paper, and packed the diamonds into a parcel. But before

sealing the packet he wrote a few lines on the margin of the paper,—

“DEAR MISS DESMOND,

“I beg you to retain the enclosed. They were given to you as an evidence of my esteem and admiration, as well as of my gratitude for your indulgent kindness to one so much beneath you as myself. I implore you to forget and pardon what has happened to-night. I am too ignorant of the world in which you live to know what I ought to do; and I can only assure you that I am ready to submit myself entirely to your discretion, and still hold myself bound by every word I said in this room on the day when you promised to be my wife.

“Yours sincerely,

“FRANCIS TREDETHLYN.”

No one but the servants knew when or how Mr. Tredethlyn left the Cedars on that first night of the New Year; but a little before one o'clock the next day a letter was delivered to Mr. Hillary—a letter from the assistant-manager of a certain bank in the City, informing the merchant that a sum of twenty thousand pounds had that morning been placed to his credit.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### SOMETHING LIKE FRIENDSHIP.

MAUDE HILLARY did not rise very early after that New Year's entertainment at the Cedars; painful emotions, troubles, doubts, and perplexities, that had been unknown to her through all her previous lifetime, had crowded suddenly upon her within the last few weeks, and it was scarcely strange if she well-nigh fainted under the burden. She slept for some hours on that first night of the year,—slept the feverish, heavy slumber that waits upon trouble of mind and exhaustion of body. The winter sun shone with a chill brightness between the rose-coloured draperies of her window when she awoke from a painful dream to a dim sense of actual trouble that was still more painful. She remembered the scene of the previous night, her own desperate appeal for help, Francis Tredethlyn's avowal, and Julia's indignation. She remembered all this with a burning sense of shame, and with a tender and pitying regret for Julia's wrongs.

“And he did not love her!” she thought, “when I fancied they were so happy and united, so much what lovers ought to be; it was all false, after all, and he had deceived her. But why? What motive could he have for doing her so great a wrong?”

Miss Hillary pondered upon this mystery while she dressed,—unaided this morning, for she did not care to endure her maid's sympathetic remarks upon her pale face and heavy eyes; unaided, for how soon that pretty Twickenham paradise, with all its dependencies, might pass away from her, unsubstantial as the fairy palace in which Princess Balroubadour floated away to Africa! Maude put on her plainest morning dress, and went straight to Julia's room, intending to make her peace with that young lady, at any cost of self-humiliation. No base thought of Julia's obligations, no remembrance of the favours that had been heaped upon the Irish girl in that hospitable habitation, had any place in Maude Hillary's mind. She thought of her friend as tenderly as she might have thought of an only sister, and she remembered nothing except the great wrong that had been done to Julia by the defection of her lover. The breach between them was not to be narrowed. When Maude entered her friend's bedroom, she only found an empty and desolate-looking apartment, in which open wardrobes and drawers, and a dressing-table, cleared of all its pretty frivolities, bore witness to the angry Julia's departure.

Miss Hillary's maid came running along the corridor, while her mistress stood amazed in Miss Desmond's deserted chamber.

"Oh, Miss," cried the girl, "to think as you should get up and dress yourself without a bit of help, while I've been waiting and listening for the bell these last two hours! Miss Desmond, she have gone, Miss, above an hour ago, and have took all her boxes in a fly to the station, but wouldn't have none of the servants to go with her; and Oh, Miss, she looked as white as that toilet-cover."

That was all Maude could hear of her sometime friend's abrupt departure from that pleasant dwelling-place, in which she had enjoyed such a luxurious home. This was all that the servants could tell their young mistress about the splendid Julia; but in the study, where the scene of the previous night had been enacted, Maude found a letter directed to herself, in Miss Desmond's handwriting. It was a very brief missive; almost such a one as an English Elizabeth, or a Russian Catherine, might have written.

"For your father's hospitality," wrote Miss Desmond, "I shall always remain grateful, and shall be sorry to hear of any evil that may befall him. The debt I owe to *you* I shall also know how to remember, and shall wait the time and opportunity for its repayment.—J. D."

Maude sat for some time musing sorrowfully upon this oracular epistle. She was not in any wise terrified by her friend's threats; she was only sorry for Julia's disappointment.

"She must have loved Francis Tredethlyn very dearly," Miss

Hillary thought, sorrowfully, "or she would never feel his conduct so deeply. And yet I have often fancied that she spoke of him coldly, almost contemptuously."

Poor Maude Hillary's lessons in the mysteries of every-day life had only just begun; she had yet to learn that there are other disappointments than those which wait upon true love, other pains and sorrows than those which have their root in the heart; and that there are such things as marrying and giving in marriage for the love of thirty thousand a year.

She spent a weary day in the pleasant drawing-room, where the red glow of a great fire illuminated as much prettiness in the way of china, and Parian, and bronze, and ormolu, and enamel, as would have stocked a *bric-à-brac* shop in Wardour Street. She spent a tiresome day, that seemed interminably long, lying on a low sofa near the fire, thinking of her father's troubles and Julia's desertion. She thought also of that cruel scene, in which she had seemed to play so contemptible a part. What bitter humiliation it was to look back upon, now that the mad impulse of the moment, the desperate courage that had made her snatch at *any* chance of help for her father, had altogether passed away! How mean and pitiful the whole business seemed now to her calmer judgment, looked upon in the cold light of common sense! A borrower, a beggar almost, a miserable suppliant to her friend's affianced husband. What wonder that Francis Tredethlyn had basely taken advantage of that false position, to sow a passion whose least expression was an insult to her on the lips of Julia Desmond's lover? And then what wasted humiliation, what unnecessary shame; for had not she turned upon him and upbraided him in the next moment, forgetful of her father's desperate need!

Such thoughts as these were scarcely pleasant company all through that brief January day, which seemed so long to Maude Hillary. The slow hours crept on, and she still lay tossing restlessly on the sofa, which offered all that upholstery can offer for the consolation of a troubled mind. A servant brought lamps, and crept from window to window, drawing the curtains as stealthily as a burglar would have cut a square out of the iron door of Mr. Hillary's plate-room. The first dinner-bell rang out in the old-fashioned cupola upon the roof, and informed all Twickenham that it was time for the people at the Cedars to array themselves for the evening meal: but Maude still lay upon the sofa, hiding her flushed face in the pillows, and trying to quiet the throbbing in her burning head. What did it matter? The poor inexperienced girl broke down all at once in her social comedy. She could act the wearisome play no longer; she wanted to give up all her share in this world, and to go to bed and lie there quietly until she died. All the common busi-

ness of life seemed unutterably loathsome to her,—the dressing and dining, the simpering small-talk, the finery of a grand house no longer honestly maintained. Oh, that it could all be swept away like the vision engendered out of some troubled slumber; giving place to a suburban cottage and a life of decent toil!

"I have seen girls—well-bred, good-looking girls, trudging in the muddy London streets, with music portfolios in their arms, while I have been out shopping in my carriage," she thought. "Oh, if I could only be like one of these, and work for papa, and see him happy, smiling at me across our little table, as I gave him his dinner, and not brooding as he does now, hour after hour, hour after hour, in this grand drawing-room, with the same settled look of trouble on his face!"

It was not only of late that Maude had watched her father anxiously and sadly. Very often during the year just passed, and even in the year preceding that, the girl had been alarmed by Lionel Hillary's moody looks and long gloomy reveries, out of which it was his wont to rouse himself in a mechanical kind of way when strangers were present. But the merchant always gave the same explanation of his sombre looks. Those headaches, those constitutional headaches, which came upon him constantly through the fatigue and worry of business—those terrible headaches made an excuse for everything, and Maude's fears about her father related solely to his health. How should she understand the dismal diagnosis of commercial disease? How should she imagine that there was any limit to the fairy purse of Fortunatus—any chance of a blight in Aladdin's orchard of jewelled fruits?

The second dinner-bell rang, and there was no sign of the merchant's return. It had been a common thing lately for Lionel Hillary to keep his cook in a fever of vexation over the hot plates and furnaces where the viands for the diurnal banquet simmered and frizzled in their copper receptacles. Maude felt no special alarm about her father. Why should he hurry home to lengthen the long evening of brooding thought and care? Why should she wish him home, when, out of all the depth of her love and devotion, she could not conjure one word of comfort wherewith to greet him?

She was thinking this when the door was opened suddenly by an eager hand, and Mr. Hillary came into the room.

His daughter rose from the sofa, startled by the suddenness of his entrance. It is a small action, that of opening a door, and entering a room; but there was as great a change in Mr. Hillary's performance of it, as if twenty years had suddenly been lifted from his life.

"My darling!" he cried, taking his daughter in his arms, "it is you whom I have to thank. It was your doing, was it not?"

"What, papa?"

"The money—the twenty thousand pounds."

"Twenty thousand pounds!"

She thought the burning pain in her head had engendered some sudden delirium. She could not believe that this was her father's face, lighted by a hopeful smile, such as she had not seen upon it during the last three years.

"What twenty thousand pounds, papa?"

"The sum that has been placed to my credit to-day anonymously. The bank people refused to tell me the name of my benefactor. I look to you, Maude, to solve the mystery. There is only one man whom I know of, rich enough to advance such a sum of money—young enough to do it in so Utopian a manner. There is only one man, Maude, and his name is Francis Tredethlyn. Tell me, my dear, have I guessed rightly?"

"You have, papa. Yes, I am sure you have. Poor fellow! and I was so angry with him last night. It was very good of him to do this, papa."

"Good of him!" cried the merchant—"good of him to lend twenty thousand pounds, without a halfpennyworth of security! Upon my word, Maude, it is good; and I can assure you it's a kind of goodness that is very uncommon in the City."

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### POOR FRANCIS.

FROM the second day of the New Year things went pleasantly enough in the Twickenham household. How could Maude do otherwise than rejoice in the salvation of her father's honour—to say nothing of his commercial prosperity—even though that salvation had been obtained by a great humiliation on her own part? She would have borne that humiliation very willingly, and would have freely acknowledged her obligation to Francis Tredethlyn, could she have seen Julia Desmond reconciled to her lover. But the separation between these two, which had arisen out of the scene on New Year's night, was a perpetual reproach to Maude Hillary.

She was not able to be quite happy, therefore, even though such a terrible burden had been lifted from her,—even though she saw the dark cloud swept away from her father's face. Her girlish frivolity had departed from her for ever on that terrible night in her father's study at Brighton; and there was a womanly softness, a pensive tenderness in her manner now, that made her even more bewitching than of old. Her affection for her father—always the ruling passion of her simple mind—

had been intensified by that fiery ordeal through which she had so lately passed ; and there was something very beautiful in the union which now existed between the father and daughter. Mr. Hillary had been surprised into confidences that made a new tie between himself and his child. He could never again entirely withhold his secrets from that tender friend and consoler. He could never again think of her as a beautiful, frivolous creature, only intended to wear expensive dresses and float about in graceful attitudes amongst the costly *bric-à-brac* of a fashionable drawing-room. He had learned to trust his child ; and poor Maude applied herself diligently to the study of the customs and dealings common in that mysterious region known to her as the City. She tried to understand her father's position—for she was tormented by a feverish anxiety as to the repayment of Francis Tredethlyn's twenty thousand pounds ; but the complications of an Australian merchant's trade, as affected by wars, and rumours of wars, by alterations in the rate of discount and the price of Consols, were a little beyond Miss Hillary's comprehension, and she was fain to give up the attempt in despair, and to accept any statement which her father cared to make to her respecting the altered aspect of his affairs.

There was less company at the Cedars than usual during the bleak early months of the year. Mr. Hillary worked very sedulously in the City during this time, and did not care to fill his house with frivolous young idlers or ponderous City-bred matrons and their fashionably-educated daughters. The recklessness engendered by the contemplation of inevitable ruin had given place to the careful dealing of a man who has a difficult but not impossible task allotted to him. You can scarcely expect the daughters of King Danäus to labour very arduously in the filling of those buckets which they *know* will not hold water ; but if the buckets are only thin at the bottom, and *may* possibly carry their contents safely to the well, it is worth while to work conscientiously.

Francis Tredethlyn's twenty thousand pounds had done wonders for Lionel Hillary ; but the dry-rot had been for a long time at work in that stately ship of which the merchant was captain, and the successful navigation of the vessel, amidst all the rocks and shoals and tempests of the commercial ocean, was by no means an easy duty.

But Mr. Hillary was sanguine, and his daughter saw the new hopefulness and brightness of his face, and was very nearly happy. She was not quite happy, for Harcourt Lowther's letters grew more despondent and complaining by every mail. He reproached Maude Hillary for her prosperity and her indifference ; she must be indifferent, he argued, or she would

have succeeded ere this in obtaining her father's consent to her marriage with the penniless officer. "There are girls who will go through fire and water for the man they love," he wrote in an epistle that was half filled with fierce reproaches. "I have seen the power of a woman's devotion; but then *that* woman was only a poor simple creature, and not the daughter of a millionaire. I cannot believe that you could fail to influence your father, if you really cared to do so. If you loved me, Maude, this business would have been settled long ago."

Did she love him? That was a question which she had never set herself to answer. Had they not engaged themselves to each other in the prettiest and most sentimental fashion, like a modern Master of Ravenswood and Lucy Ashton? Maude took the fact of her love for granted. All the sweetest and tenderest dreams of her life were mingled with the memory of Harcourt Lowther. He was so superior to all the other men who had paid her their homage; and it may be that his contemptuous bearing towards those other men had been a part of the fascination of his manner. He had affected that modern Edgar Ravenswood tone—that elegant Timon of Athens-ism—which is so intensely charming in the eyes of a very young woman, however spurious it may be. And with all this, he had been so devoted, so delightfully exacting, so deliciously jealous! Maude looked back to the one sentimental period of her life, and saw Harcourt Lowther's image radiant in all the light of her own youthful fancies. So the worshipper in a village chapel sees some poor painted wooden figure of a saint glorified by the glitter of tapers, the brightness of flowers and draperies and decorations. How was she to separate the lamps and the flowers about the shrine from the image which they adorned? How was she to discover the paltry nature of that clay out of which the graceful figure was fashioned? Harcourt Lowther represented to her all that was brightest and best in her early girlhood; and sitting alone, through long and thoughtful hours, in the empty rooms at the Cedars, Maude Hillary brooded very sadly upon the only love-story of her life.

She had ventured to speak of Harcourt to her father once since the beginning of the year. But her timid pleading had been met by a cruel repulse.

"Understand me at once and for ever, Maude," Lionel Hillary said, sternly; "such a marriage as that can never be. If you were the great heiress people think you, I might gratify this whim, as I have gratified other fancies, foolish and extravagant in their way. But the road I am now treading is by no means too secure under my feet, and I cannot afford to see my only child the wife of a penniless adventurer. I want to see you happy, Maude, but not after a sentimental girl's notion of

happiness. I know what all those pretty theories about a suburban cottage and poverty come to when they are put into practice. I have seen the slipshod maid-of-all-work, and the miserable dinners, and the Kidderminster carpets, and stale bread and rank butter, that belong to love in a cottage. And more than this, Maude, I know that Harcourt Lowther is the very last man to ally himself to a dowerless wife."

"Ah, how little you know him!" Maude murmured, softly. She thought she knew her lover so well herself, and fancied him the most generous and devoted of men because he had given her a few half-guinea bouquets, purchased on credit from a confiding florist. "Ah, dear papa, how little you know him! He is always reproaching me with my fortune, and lamenting the gulf it has made between us. Let me tell him of your difficulties; let me tell him that I am no longer a millionaire's daughter, that I am free to marry the man I love. Ah, let me tell him——"

"Not a word, Maude," answered Lionel Hillary—"not a word to that man, if you have any love or respect for your father. Remember that I have trusted you with secrets that a man seldom confides to his daughter."

"And your confidence shall be sacred, papa," Miss Hillary replied, submissively. And thus ended her intercession in favour of Harcourt Lowther.

She was fain to be contented, however, remembering the great trouble which had been so near her, and which a merciful hand had lifted away. She was fain to remember, shudderingly, the feverish horror of that night at Brighton, and to think gratefully of Francis Tredethlyn, to whom she owed her father's rescue. She was grateful to him; but she could not put entirely away from her the sense of shame left by that scene in the study, and Julia Desmond's passionate reproaches. She could not forget that it was for her sake Francis Tredethlyn had helped her father, and that the burden of a great obligation must rest upon her shoulders until that loan of twenty thousand pounds was repaid. Poor Maude's unbusiness-like mind entirely ignored any such thing as interest for Mr. Tredethlyn's money. She only thought of the loan itself, and the question of its repayment was perpetually in her mind. Had she not been the suppliant, at whose suit the money had been lent? and was she not in a manner the actual debtor?

Things were much better in the City, her father told her; but upon two or three occasions when she had ventured to hint her anxiety respecting the early repayment of Francis Tredethlyn's money, the merchant's answers had filled her mind with vague disquietude. There was an indifference in Mr. Hillary's manner that alarmed Maude's keen sense of right and honour.

"Tredethlyn is too well off to want his money in any desperate hurry, my dear," he said; "he is not likely to become a very pressing creditor."

The hedgerows about Isleworth and Twickenham were green with their earliest buds before Francis Tredethlyn came again to the Cedars. Mr. Hillary had called upon the young man at his hotel several times before he succeeded in seeing him, and had only with great difficulty wrung from him an admission of the fact that he was the anonymous lender of the twenty thousand pounds that had saved the merchant from ruin and disgrace.

"My dear Tredethlyn, why should you insist upon any disguise?" Mr. Hillary said, with a pleasant ease that not every man could have maintained in such a position as that in which the merchant found himself with regard to this simple-minded, country-bred Croesus. "Is it not enough to have been the most generous of men, without trying to carry generosity to the verge of Quixotism? How can I doubt the identity of my preserver? I know that Maude betrayed my necessities to you, under the excitement of those unfortunate theatricals, and I know that loans of twenty thousand pounds do not drop from the skies. My dear fellow, I am most heartily thankful to you for what you have done. It was a very noble thing to do, an action that any man might be proud of doing. If I had ever doubted your having good blood in your veins, your conduct in this one matter would have settled my doubts. But I never did doubt it, my dear Tredethlyn. I have recognized you from the first as a gentleman; not by the right of an accidental thirty thousand a year, scraped out of all manner of commercial gutters by a miserly uncle; but by virtue of some of the best blood in the West of England."

And then Mr. Hillary stretched out both his hands, and shook those of Francis Tredethlyn in his vigorous grasp; and altogether the interview could scarcely have been more entirely satisfactory had the merchant written a cheque for the twenty thousand pounds on the spot. Indeed, to Francis any immediate repayment of that money would have been a grievous mortification. Was it not delightful to him to remember that he had been of service to *her* father? Was not the money advanced to the merchant a kind of link between Maude and the man who loved her so dearly and so hopelessly,—only a very sordid, earthy link; but better than none?

"I offended her very much that night," Francis thought; "but perhaps she will forgive me, and remember me kindly, when she thinks that I have been useful to her father." But when Mr. Hillary begged Francis to renew his visits to Twickenham, the young man resisted those friendly invitations as obstinately as if the Cedars had been the most obnoxious

place upon earth. He could not muster up courage to encounter Maude Hillary after that scene in the little study. What if he had offended too deeply for forgiveness? What if she slew him with a frozen glance from her lovely eyes? Again and again in his lonely rides, emboldened by the dusky twilight of the early spring evenings, he had ventured to haunt the neighbourhood of the old brick-built mansion by the river; but he could not bring himself to go any nearer to the shrine of his divinity; and he made all manner of lame excuses in answer to Mr. Hillary's cordial invitations.

He was only a clod; only an uneducated rustic, newly cast upon a strange world, open to all the pleasant snares which are laid for the simple-minded possessor of thirty thousand a year. Heaven only knows the perils and temptations into which some young men would have fallen under similar circumstances. It is something in Francis Tredethlyn's favour that his worst mistake was to fall desperately in love with Maude Hillary, and wear his horse's shoes out in disconsolate rides about the twilit lanes and roads in the neighbourhood of her dwelling-place.

And in the mean time Messrs. Kursdale and Scardon were supposed to be busily employed in their search for the missing girl, who might or might not have any right to another name than that of Susan Tredethlyn. Very little came of the lawyers' endeavours. Several advertisements had been inserted in the "Times;" but it is to be feared that the lost and missing advertised for in those columns are too often wanderers in a weary region, far removed from that comfortable sphere of life in which the morning papers are punctually delivered to enliven the breakfast-table. No reply came to any of those mysteriously-worded appeals to Francis Tredethlyn's cousin which were concocted by the young man and his legal advisers; and the image of the friendless girl grew paler and fainter day by day in the mind of Maude Hillary's adorer.

At last Fortune—who will generally do anything in the world for us, if we have patience enough to wait her own time for doing it—brought about the result which Francis Tredethlyn had so obstinately avoided, yet so fondly desired. Lounging against the rails one brilliant April day at the corner opposite Apsley House, Francis saw Maude Hillary's carriage drive into the Park.

Yes, there she was, with her sunny hair framed in spring blossoms and white areophane. The young man seemed to behold the vision of an angel in a Parisian bonnet, and half wondered if the folds of her white burnous were not a pair of downy pinions floating away from her divine shoulders. He grew very red and uncomfortable, and in another moment would have yielded to the impulse that prompted him to seek

refuge in flight; but before he could do so, the carriage was close to the rails, Maude Hillary had recognized him, and had told the coachman to stop.

She was not offended with him, then; she forgave him, and thought of him kindly. His heart swelled with a rapture that was almost overpowering. Ah! *this* was love. How different from that placid sense of affection with which he had regarded his cousin, Susy! how much more delicious! how infinitely more painful!

"I have wanted so much to see you, Mr. Tredethlyn," Maude said, after shaking hands with her bewildered admirer; "why have you never been to Twickenham?"

"I—I—don't like—I thought you were angry with me," stammered Francis, very awkwardly. Ah, how sad it is that the presence of those we love best, and in whose eyes we would most desire to appear at an advantage, should entail upon us the annihilation of anything like ease or grace of manner! Mr. Tredethlyn felt himself becoming purple and apoplectic, under the influence of that seraphic creature, whose image had filled his mind unceasingly for the last six months.

"Angry with you!" exclaimed Maude; "how should I be otherwise than grateful to you, when I remember how good you have been to papa? Believe me, Mr. Tredethlyn, I am not too proud to own the extent of our obligation. I thank you most sincerely. You can never know how grateful I am for the service you have rendered my dear father."

She bent her head, and the spring-flowers in her bonnet were very near him as she said this in a low, earnest voice. But in the next moment the memory of that uncomfortable scene in the study flashed back upon her, and she felt that she must always be more or less in a false position with regard to Francis Tredethlyn. She made a little effort to set herself right before she parted from him.

"You have seen Julia; you and she are reconciled, I hope, Mr. Tredethlyn?"

"No; indeed, I have never heard from her since—since I left the Cedars. Your papa told me that she—Oh, Miss Hillary, I think it was better that we should part. I don't think that we had either of us ever really cared for each other. It was better that it should end as it did."

"But I would give so much to find Julia, to hear where she is."

Francis Tredethlyn shook his head hopelessly. He had a vague idea that he had not done his very uttermost in his search for his cousin Susan, and he recoiled with terror from the idea of having to engage in a hunt for Miss Desmond.

"Good-bye, Mr. Tredethlyn; I hope that all will come right,

after all; and I hope that you will believe I am grateful for your goodness to my father."

She held out her hand, and the Cornishman took it in his own with almost as reverential a touch as if it had been some relic handed to him from an altar. The carriage drove off immediately after this, and Francis saw that seraphic bonnet with the spring-blossoms melt away and lose itself among mundane bonnets. He lingered at the rails till the carriage came back again, and still lingered after that, thinking that Miss Hillary's equipage would again return to Hyde-Park Corner; but after out-watching all the loungers by the rails, and seeing the last of the carriages leaving the Ladies' Mile, he was fain to go home, resigned to the obvious fact that Maude Hillary had left the Park by the Kensington gates on her homeward route.

He went home, but not disconsolate. Had he not seen and spoken with that divinity before whom he was the simplest worshipper who ever bowed before any earthly shrine? Was he not assured of her forgiveness? nay, even of her gratitude? Her gratitude—Maude Hillary's gratitude, in exchange for that vile dross which he had ever held so lightly. Money was indeed good for something, if it could buy the rapture of that little interview across the park-rail, in which Francis had played so very poor a part. He went home, and carried Maude Hillary's image with him, and walked up and down his big sitting-room in the Covent Garden Hotel, smoking a cigar and thinking of the woman he loved: he thought of her quite as hopelessly as ever *Claude Melnotte* could have thought of *Pauline* before *Beauseant's* diabolical suggestions had prompted him to his treacherous wooing. He thought of her as innocently as a schoolboy thinks of the stage fairy-queen in a Christmas pantomime, and no ambitious or selfish dream had any abode in his mind; only when a brief note reached him from Lionel Hillary, renewing the old unceremonious invitation to the Cedars, poor Francis could no longer resist the voice of the charmer, but was fain to pack his portmanteau and drive down to the merchant's office, whence Mr. Hillary was to convey him in the mail phaeton to Twickenham. She was not angry with him, and he might bask in the sunshine of her presence! For a little while he might enjoy the dangerous delight, and then the officer to whom she was betrothed would come back to claim her, and there would be wedding at the old church by the Thames; and he, Francis, would see his divinity radiant in bridal robes and crowned with orange-flowers before he departed for ever into the outer darkness where she was not.

## CHAPTER XIX.

## MR. HILLARY SPEAKS HIS MIND.

FTER that meeting in Hyde Park, Francis Tredethlyn came very often to the Cedars; so often, as to engender a vague uneasiness in Miss Hillary's mind. She knew that he loved her. If that sudden declaration in the study had never occurred to reveal the fact, Maude must have been something less than a woman had she been blind to a devotion that was made manifest by every look and tone of her adorer. She knew that he loved her, and that he had done battle with his love in order that she might be happily ignorant of the pangs that tormented his simple heart. The highly educated girl was able to read the innermost secrets of that honest uncultivated mind, and was fain to pity Francis Tredethlyn's wasted suffering. Alas! had she not indeed traded upon his devotion, and obtained her father's safety at the expense of her own honour?

Such thoughts as these tormented Miss Hillary perpetually now that Francis spent so much of his life at Twickenham. She perceived with inexpressible pain that her father encouraged the young man's visits,—her father, who could not surely shut his eyes to the real state of the Cornishman's feelings; yet who knew of her engagement to Harcourt Lowther. She did not know that Julia Desmond had taken good care to inform Francis of that engagement, and that the young man came knowingly to his delicious torture. She did not know this; and all that womanly compassion which was natural to her, that pitying tenderness which showed itself in the injudicious relief of bare-faced tramps and vagabonds about the Twickenham lanes, and the pampering of troublesome pet dogs and canary birds—all her womanly pity, I say, was aroused by the thought that she was loved, and loved in vain, by an honest and generous heart.

Thus it came to pass that she could no longer endure the course which events were taking, and she determined upon speaking to her father. They had dined alone one bright June evening: they were not often thus together now, for Mr. Hillary had fallen into his old habit of bringing visitors from London, and the ponderous matrons and croquet-playing young ladies inflicted a good deal of their company upon Maude. They had dined alone, and Miss Hillary seized the opportunity of speaking to her father upon that one subject which had so long occupied her thoughts.

"Mr. Tredethlyn comes here very often, papa," she said, breaking ground very gently.

Lionel Hillary filled his glass, retiring as it were behind the

claret-jug, from which comfortable shelter he replied to his daughter's remark,—

"Often?—yes—I suppose he does spend a good deal of his time here. I am glad that he should do so; he is an excellent young man, a noble-hearted young fellow—the best friend I have in the world."

Mr. Hillary was a long time filling that one glass of claret, and his face was quite hidden by the crystal jug.

"Yes, papa, he is very good; but do you think it is quite right—quite wise to invite him so often?"

"Right—wise?" cried Mr. Hillary; "what, in the name of all that's absurd, can you mean by talking of the right or wisdom of an invitation to dinner? The young man likes to come here, and I like the young man, and like to see him here. That is about all that can be said upon the subject."

Maude was silent for some moments. It was very difficult to discuss this question with her father, but she had grown familiar with difficulties within the past few months, and was no longer the frivolous girl who had known no loftier cause of anxiety than the uncertain health of her Skye terrier. She returned to the charge presently.

"Dear papa, I am sorry to worry you about this business," she said, gently, "but there are such peculiar circumstances in our acquaintance with Mr. Tredethlyn—we are under so deep an obligation to him, and——"

"And on that account we ought to shut our doors in his face, I suppose!" exclaimed Mr. Hillary, with some show of impatience. "My dear Maude, what mare's-nest have you lighted upon?"

"It is so difficult for me to explain myself, papa: you can never imagine how difficult. But I think you ought to understand what I mean. When Julia was here, Mr. Tredethlyn's visits were quite natural, and I was always glad to see him; but it was my application to him for the loan of that money which resulted in the breaking of Julia's engagement. I cannot forget that night, papa; nothing but desperation would have prompted me to appeal to Francis Tredethlyn; and now that we are under this great obligation to him, I feel that we are bound to him by a kind of duty. We have, at least, no right to deceive him."

"Deceive him! Who does deceive him?"

"Willingly, no one. But he may deceive himself, papa. You force me to speak very plainly. Upon the night on which I appealed to him for that loan, he told me that he loved me, even though he was then engaged to Julia. There was something in his manner that convinced me of his sincerity, though I was shocked at the want of honour involved in such a

declaration. But now that his engagement to Julia has been broken off, indirectly through my agency, he may think it likely that——”

“He may think it likely that you would be wise enough to accept one of the best fellows that ever lived for your husband. Is that what you mean, Maude?”

“Papa!”

“Oh, my dear, I have no doubt you think me a cruel father, because I venture to make such a suggestion. But surely, Maude, you cannot have been blind to this young man’s devotion. From the very first it has been obvious to anyone gifted with the smallest power of perception. Julia Desmond contrived, by her consummate artifice, to inveigle the poor fellow into a false position; but in spite even of that foolish engagement, he has been devoted to you, Maude, from the first. I have seen it, and have counted, Heaven knows how fully, upon a marriage between you and him.”

“You have done this, papa, and yet you knew all about Harcourt,” exclaimed Maude, reproachfully.

“I knew that you were a foolishly sentimental girl, ready to believe in any yellow-whiskered young Admirable Crichton, who could make pretty speeches, and criticise the newest Italian opera, or Tennyson’s last poem. But I knew something more than this, Maude; I knew the state of my own affairs, and that my only hope for you lay in a wealthy marriage.”

“And you thought that I would marry for money—you could think so meanly of me, papa!”

“I thought that you were a sensible, high-spirited girl, and that when you came to know the desperation of the case, you would show yourself of the true metal—as you did that night at Brighton; as you did when you asked Tredethlyn for the loan which saved me from ruin.”

Lionel Hillary stretched out his hand as he spoke, and grasped that of his daughter. In the next minute she was by his side, bending over him and caressing him. Only lately it had begun to dawn dimly upon Maude Hillary, that perhaps this father, whom she loved so dearly, was not the noblest and most honourable of men: but if any such knowledge had come to her, it had only intensified the tenderness with which, from her earliest childhood, she had regarded that indulgent father. The experience of sorrow had transformed and exalted her nature; and she was able to look upon Lionel Hillary’s weaknesses with pitying regret, rather than with any feeling of contempt or indignation.

“Dear papa,” she said, very gravely, “you and I love each other so dearly, that there should be no possibility of any misunderstanding between us. I can never marry Mr. Tredethlyn;

I know that he is good and generous-minded and simple-hearted; I feel the extent of our obligation to him, but I can never be his wife. It is for this reason that I am fearful lest any false impression may arise in his mind. Pray, dear papa, take this into consideration, and do not let him come here so often—at any rate, not until you have been able to repay him his money, not until the burden of this great obligation has been removed from us."

Lionel Hillary laughed aloud.

"Not until the money has been paid! I'm afraid, in that case, Tredethlyn will stop away from this house for a long time to come."

"A long time, papa! But you told me you would be able to repay the twenty thousand pounds," said Maude, turning very pale.

"And I dare say I shall be able to pay the money some day. Such a loan as that is not repaid in a few months, Maude. How should you understand these matters? The twenty thousand pounds went to fill a yawning gulf in my business, and it would be about as easy for me to get the same amount of money back out of that gulf as it would for a single diver to bring up the treasures of a sunken argosy."

Maude sighed wearily. It seemed as if a kind of net had been woven round her, and that she suddenly found herself in the centre of it, unable to move.

"Papa," she cried, "you don't mean that Mr. Tredethlyn's money is lost?"

"Lost! No, child; but it may be a very long time before I shall be able to pay him. If you were not so foolish as to throw away one of the noblest hearts in Christendom—to say nothing of the fortune that goes along with it—there would be very little need for me to worry myself about this money."

"Oh, I understand, papa. If I were Mr. Tredethlyn's wife, you would not be obliged to pay the twenty thousand pounds," said Maude, very slowly.

"I should not be tormented about it as I am now. Say no more, my dear; you don't understand these things, and you drive me very nearly mad with your questions about my affairs."

"Forgive me, papa. No, I don't understand—I can't understand all at once; it seems so strange to me."

She bent her head and kissed her father on the forehead, and then went quietly out of the room; leaving him alone in the still summer twilight, with a belated wasp buzzing feebly amongst the fruit and flowers on the table. Maude went to her own room, and sitting there in the dusk, shed some of the bitterest tears that had ever fallen from her eyes. The discovery of her father's views with regard to her had humiliated her to

the very dust. The idea that Francis Tredethlyn's loan would never be repaid was torture to her keen sense of honour; torture which was rendered still more poignant by the recollection of her own part in the transaction. Would he ever be paid? Would that money, for the loan of which—and never more than the loan—she had supplicated her friend's betrothed husband, would that money ever be returned to the generous young man who had so freely lent it? Her father had said that it would in due course; but there was something in his manner that had neutralized the effect of his words. To Maude Hillary's mind this debt was a very sacred one, a debt which *must* be repaid, and for which she herself was responsible. Twenty thousand pounds;—all the faculties of her brain seemed to swim in a great sea of confusion as she thought of that terrible sum—twenty thousand pounds, which she was bound to see duly paid; and she was no longer an heiress, to whom money was dross. She was a penniless, helpless girl: worse off than other penniless girls by reason of her inexperience of poverty.

She thought of Harcourt Lowther; and his image seemed to shine upon her across a wilderness of troubles; a bright and pleasant thing to look at, but with no promise of help, no inspiration of hope, no pledge of comfort in its brightness.

"Perhaps papa is right, after all," she thought, "and Harcourt would scarcely care to burden himself with a penniless wife."

She was ashamed of this brief treason against her lover, almost as soon as the thought had shaped itself; only in her despair it seemed to her as if there could be no security of any happiness upon this earth.

"I will tell Francis Tredethlyn the truth about myself," she thought; "he shall not be deceived as to anything in which I am concerned. He shall know of my engagement to Harcourt."

Maude did not go downstairs again that night, nor did Mr. Hillary send for her, as it was his wont to do when she was long away from him. It may be that he scarcely cared to encounter his daughter after that conversation in the dining-room, which had been far from pleasant to him. He was not a father of Mr. Capulet's class, who could order his daughter to marry the County Paris at a few days' notice; or in the event of her refusal, bid her rot in the streets of Verona. But from the very first he had been bent upon bringing about a union between Francis and Maude, and he brooded moodily over the girl's resolute rejection of any such alliance.

"What would become of her if I were to die to-morrow?" he thought; "and what is to become of my business if I fail to secure a rich partner?"

## CHAPTER XX.

## AN EXPLANATION.

FRANCIS TREDETHLYN, now so frequent a visitor at the Cedars, happened to present himself there upon the day after that on which Maude had come to an understanding with her father. The young man rode down to Twickenham in the afternoon, and found Miss Hillary occupied with two croquet-playing young ladies and a croquet-playing young gentleman, whose manners and opinions were of the same insipidly flaxen hue as their hair and eyebrows.

There was a tired look in Maude's face that afternoon, which was very perceptible to Francis Tredehlyn, although quite invisible to the neutral-tinted croquet-players. Her eyes wandered away sometimes from the balls and mallets, and fixed themselves, with a sad, dreamy look, upon the sunlit river or the distant woodland. Francis saw this, and that faithful Cornish heart grew heavy in sympathy with Miss Hillary's unknown trouble. There must be a little of the Newfoundland dog in the nature of a man who can love hopelessly; a little of that superhuman fidelity, a little of that canine endurance which has inspired so many odious comparisons to the disparagement of the inferior animal called man. Francis Tredehlyn's eyes followed Miss Hillary with a dog-like patience all this afternoon, during which he established himself in the estimation of the flaxen-haired droppers-in as one of the vilest of croquet-players and worst-mannered of men. But the croquet-players departed, after taking tea out of a very ugly Queen-Anne teapot and some old Sèvres cups and saucers, which had been bought for Miss Hillary at the sale of a defunct collector's goods and chattels, at Messrs. Christie and Manson's. Francis stayed to dinner, and dined alone with Maude and her father, and found very little to say for himself. He was distracted by the sight of Maude's pale face and sadly thoughtful eyes. How changed she was from the bright and sparkling creature whom he remembered a few months ago in that house! How changed! What was the secret trouble which had worked that transformation? What could it be except Miss Hillary's sorrow for the circumstances that divided her from her distant lover? There could be no other cause for her unhappiness, since her father's commercial difficulties had been smoothed by that twenty thousand pounds so freely advanced to him; and it never occurred to Francis that Maude Hillary could possibly give herself any uneasiness about that money, so lightly parted with by him; nor could he think that any new trouble threatened

the merchant's peace, for Mr. Hillary was specially gay and pleasant this evening.

After dinner Maude strolled out into the garden, and down to that delicious terrace by the river, where the big stone vases of geraniums looked dark and grim in the twilight. She walked slowly up and down the long esplanade with a filmy lace handkerchief tied coquettishly over her head, and her long muslin dress sweeping and rustling after her like the draperies of a fashionably-attired ghost. Francis Tredethlyn furtively watched that white-robed figure in the shadowy distance as he sat at the dinner-table with Mr. Hillary, and would fain have left his glass, filled with the merchant's rarest Burgundy, for a stroll by the quiet river. Perhaps Mr. Hillary perceived this, for he presently gave the young man his release.

"Since you don't drink your wine, you may as well go for a stroll in the garden, Tredethlyn," he said, good-naturedly. "I see Maude yonder; and she'll be better company for you than I am."

Francis was by no means slow to take this hint. But once outside the dining-room windows, he went very slowly to the terrace on which Maude was walking. He walked in and out among the flower-beds, making a faint pretence of admiring nature in this twilight aspect. He stopped to caress one of Maude's Skye terriers. The animals were very fond of him now that he had learned to avoid that trampling on their toes which had been one of the earlier manifestations of his devotion to Miss Hillary. He loitered here and there on every possible pretext, and at last approached the fair deity in the muslin dress with very much the air of a schoolboy, who presents himself in that awful audience-chamber wherein a grim pedagogue is wont to pronounce terrible judgments upon youthful offenders.

He did not know that Miss Hillary had been expecting him all this time; and that her special purpose was to bring him to her side upon that solitary terrace-walk, where she could talk to him freely without fear of eavesdroppers. He did not know that he was quite as much expected as the schoolboy who has been summoned to the parlour, and was to receive a sentence as terrible.

Maude welcomed him very graciously, and for a little while they strolled side by side, talking of the summer's night, and the flowers, and Skye terriers, and canary-birds, and other subjects equally commonplace and harmless. Then they came to a stop, mechanically, as it is in the nature of people to do when they walk by the side of a river, and looked over the stone balustrade into the still water. And then a death-like silence came down upon them; and Maude Hillary felt that the time had come

in which she must utter whatever she had it in her mind to say. It was difficult to begin; but then all her duties of late had been difficult; and upon her knees the night before, in the midst of tearful prayers and meditations, she had resolved that there should be no more sailing under false colours as regarded this young man.

"Dear Mr. Tredethlyn," she began at last, "you have been so good to my father, so good to me—for to serve him is to render a double service to me—you have been so kind and generous a friend, that I have grown to think of you and trust you almost as I might if you had been my brother."

Poor Francis listened to this exordium with a very despondent air. Inexperienced as he was in the ways of the world, he was wise enough to know that there was nothing hopeful in such an address as this. When a young lady tells a gentleman that she can regard him as a brother, it is the plainest possible declaration that he can never be anything else. In this case it seemed an uncalled-for act of cruelty, for the Cornishman had never deluded himself by any false hope.

"I think of you almost as if you were my brother," Maude went on, with heartless repetition of the obnoxious word; "and I cannot help thinking, dear Mr. Tredethlyn, that you are scarcely employing your life as wisely or as well as you might. I don't think you were ever intended to be an idle man; and again, with such a fortune as yours, a man has scarcely the right to be idle. There are so many people who may be benefited by a rich man's active life. Oh, forgive me if I seem to lecture you. You will laugh at me, perhaps, and think I want to set myself up as a strong-minded woman, a political economist, or something of that kind. But I only venture to speak to you because I think you waste so much of your time down here, playing billiards with the empty-headed young men who haunt this place, and lounging in the drawing-room to hear the frivolous talk of half-a-dozen idle women, myself among the number."

She spoke lightly, but she was not the less earnest in her intention; she was only travelling gradually round to the point she wanted to reach.

"But I am so happy here," cried Francis Tredethlyn. "Ah, if you knew how I have tried to stop away—if you could only know what happiness it is to me to come—"

Maude Hillary interrupted him hastily.

"Yes, I know it is a pleasant life in its way," she said; "very pleasant and very useless. It is a little new to you perhaps, and seems pleasanter to you on that account. But if you knew what dreary work it is to look back at a long summer season of operas, and concerts, and horticultural meetings, and boat-races, and not to be able to remember one action worthy of being re-

corded in all that time! I am getting very tired of my present life, Mr. Tredehlyn. It has ceased to be pleasant to me ever since I have known of papa's difficulties. It is altogether unsuited to me; for I am engaged to marry a poor man, who would bitterly feel the burden of an expensive wife."

The bolt was launched, and Miss Hillary expected to see some evidence that it had gone home to its mark. But Francis Tredehlyn made no sign. There was just a little pause, and then he said very quietly,—

"Yes, I know that you are to marry a poor man; but with such a wife a man could scarcely remain poor. I suppose it's only an ignorant foolish notion, but I can't help thinking that for the sake of the woman he loves, any man could cut his way to fortune. I can always believe in those knights of the olden time, who used to put a badge in their helmets, and then ride off to the wars to do all sorts of miraculous things; and I fancy it must be the same now-a-days, somehow; and that a man who loves truly, and is truly loved again, can achieve anything."

Maude was inexpressibly relieved by this speech.

"You know of my engagement, then?" she said.

"Yes, I have known it for a very long time."

"Ah, of course, Julia told you?"

"Yes, it was Miss Desmond who told me."

"She had a perfect right to do so; there was no reason for any secrecy in the matter. I am very glad that you have known of it. You are so kind a friend that I should not like you to be ignorant of anything nearly relating to my father or myself."

"It is very good of you to call me a friend," Francis answered. It seemed to him as if some angelic creature was stooping from her own proper sphere to place herself for a brief interval by his side. "It is very good of you to take any interest in my welfare; and I feel that you are right. The life I lead is utterly idle and useless; but it shall be so no longer. Your father has very generously offered me a grand opportunity of turning both my time and money to account."

"My father? But how?"

"He has offered me a partnership in his own house."

"A partnership?—a partnership in his difficulties—his liabilities?" cried Maude, in a tone of horror.

"Those difficulties were only temporary. The thirty thousand I advanced have wiped out all liabilities, and your father's business stands on a firmer basis than ever."

"Thirty thousand! You have lent papa thirty thousand pounds?"

"I have not lent it, my dear Miss Hillary. I have only invested it in your father's business. There is no obligation in the matter, believe me; or if there is, it is all on my side. I get

a higher rate of interest for my money than I should get elsewhere."

He stopped suddenly, for Maude had burst into a passion of sobs.

"Oh, how could he do it? How could he?" she cried. "How could papa take so mean an advantage of your generosity? I love him so dearly, that it almost kills me to think he should be base or dishonourable. I thought the twenty thousand pounds would soon be paid, and instead of that he has borrowed more money of you."

"My dear Miss Hillary, pray, pray do not distress yourself. Believe me you misunderstand this business altogether. It is not a loan. It is only an equitable and friendly arrangement, quite as advantageous to me as to your father. Upon my word of honour you do Mr. Hillary a cruel wrong when you imagine otherwise."

Maude dried her tears, and listened to the voice of her consoler. She was so anxious to think well of her father, that she must have been something more than an ignorant, inexperienced girl, if she shut her ears to Francis Tredethlyn's arguments.

Those arguments were very convincing, very specious. Maude ought, perhaps, to have perceived that they were not the original ideas of Mr. Tredethlyn. She ought, perhaps, to have discovered the parrot-like nature of his discourse respecting all the grand prospects of the house of Hillary and Co.; but she wanted to think well of her father, and Francis Tredethlyn urged her to that conclusion. She listened to his discourse as eagerly as if he had been the most eloquent of living creatures. She felt a kind of tender friendship for him as he talked to her; never before had he seemed so nearly on a level with herself. She wanted to believe in his wisdom; she wanted to respect his sense, and judgment, because he was the defender of her father—that beloved father against whom her own conscience had so lately arisen, a stern and pitiless judge.

The quiet river rippled under the summer moonlight before Maude and her companion left the terrace; so much had Francis found to say about the house of Hillary and Co., and the wonderful advantages that must come to him from a partnership in that great firm. Surely his enthusiasm must have arisen from some vague idea that even that commercial alliance would be some kind of link between Miss Hillary and himself. He talked very freely to-night, for Maude's confidence had set him at his ease; and in almost every word he uttered he naïvely revealed some new depth in his devoted love.

Late that night, when the Cornishman had gone away, Maude stood at her open window, looking out at the river, and thinking of all that Francis Tredethlyn had said to her.

"Harcourt Lowther never loved me as this man loves me," she thought, sadly. "Ah, what a pity that there should be so much wasted love and devotion in the world!"

And then the thought of Francis Tredethlyn's thirty thousand pounds arose in her mind,—a terrible obligation, a heavy burden of debt; a debt that was perhaps never to be cancelled.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

### HARCOURT LOWTHIER'S WELCOME.

WITHIN a month from that night on which the merchant's daughter and Francis Tredethlyn had lingered so long together on the terrace up the river, Maude Hillary sat at her desk in the little study, trying to begin the most difficult letter she had ever had occasion to write.

The letter was to be addressed to Harcourt Lowther, and the three words, "My dear Harcourt," were already written on the rose-tinted foreign note-paper; but beyond those preliminary words Maude found it very difficult to proceed.

That which she had to tell the distant soldier, sorely tried by inglorious idleness in a penal settlement, and inclined to resent every stroke of ill-fortune, was by no means a pleasant thing to tell. She had to announce to him that the promise she had made long ago in the twilight by the river had been deliberately broken. She had to tell him that she was the plighted wife of another man; and she was not free to reveal to him any one of the strange circumstances that had pressed so cruelly upon her, pushing her, little by little, into this renunciation of her first and only love.

It was only a very commonplace letter that Miss Hillary could write to her discarded lover. She could only tell the old, common story, and put in the hackneyed pleas so often heard in the court of Cupid;—her father's wishes: her desire to secure his happiness rather than her own; and then a wild womanly prayer for pity: an entreaty that her lover would believe in the existence of stronger reasons—higher motives—the nature of which she was not free to reveal. And last of all, after many pages of passionate supplication for pardon, with not a little violation of the nicer laws propounded by Lindley Murray and his successors,—at the very last there came one page blotted with tears, earnest yet incoherent, in which Miss Hillary implored Mr. Lowther to forget her, and to seek happiness with a happier woman. Never had she loved him so dearly as while

she wrote that last page, in which she resigned him for ever. Surely Queen Guinevere's diamonds must have sparkled their very brightest just in that one angry moment in which she flung them into the river.

Yes, it had come to this. Maude Hillary, like a modern Iphigenia, had sacrificed herself for the benefit of her father. The burden of that debt which had been incurred by her agency had weighed too heavily upon her girlish breast. Somehow or other Francis Tredethlyn must be paid; and since he loved her so devotedly, so foolishly—since he held her as the brightest treasure to be won by aspiring man—it was surely better that he should take this poor recompense than go altogether unrewarded. It may be that Maude Hillary would under no circumstances deliberately have broken faith with her betrothed lover. But these grand crises, upon which the fate of a lifetime may depend, are apt to come very suddenly upon us. The great flood-tide of fate arises, and carries away the weak creatures afloat on its resistless waters. A moment of hesitation—a few faltering words—half doubtful, half imploring, and the thing is done.

It had all happened on the day on which Francis Tredethlyn accepted Mr. Hillary's magnanimous offer, and allowed himself to be created a sleeping partner in the Australian house. It was only natural that on such a day Francis should dine at the Cedars; and it was only natural that Lionel Hillary should make a little speech about the young man, telling his daughter of the generosity of this noble-minded Cornishman, who had been something more than a son to him—a friend, a benefactor, a preserver. What praise could be loud enough for a man who would lend thirty thousand pounds without security? And then this noble-minded Cornishman, whose heart was like a great lump of tinder—only wanting the feeblest spark to kindle it into a blaze—burst out into a passionate declaration of his love. What was his fortune but so much dirt, which he was only too glad to fling under the feet of Miss Hillary? Would he not go out into the world to-morrow penniless, barefoot, a beggar, if by so doing he could add to her happiness? He asked a few such questions as these: and then cried out suddenly that he was a despicable wretch, and that he was ashamed of himself for saying all this, when he knew that Miss Hillary's heart was given to another man. He would go, he said; she should never again be tormented by him. She should not be annoyed by so much as the mention of his name. After which passionate speech Mr. Tredethlyn grasped the merchant's hand, and then made a rush towards the door. He would fain have suited the action to the word; he wanted to go away that moment, and hide himself for ever from Maude Hillary. But before he could reach the door Maude was by his side, with her hands clasped

about his arm her face looking upward at his, and drowned with tears.

"How good you are!" she cried. "Don't go away; we cannot part from you like this. You have been so good to my father. Ah, how can we ever recompense so much devotion! If my esteem—my gratitude—can make you happy, they are yours,—they have long been yours. I renounce every other thought, every other duty. I can have no duty higher than this."

The last words were almost stifled on her lips, for Francis Tredethlyn caught her to his breast as passionately as in that last scene of the "Lady of Lyons."

"Maude, my love—my angel—you will renounce, for my sake—you—you—will be my own—my wife!" he gasped, incoherently. "No—no, I cannot accept such a sacrifice—I am not so mean, so selfish, as to——"

But Mr. Hillary, hovering over his daughter and the generous-minded young Cornishman, would not allow Francis to finish this sentence.

"My dear boy!" he exclaimed,—"my darling Maude! nothing upon earth could give me greater pleasure than this, because I know that it is for your mutual happiness. What joy can be deeper or purer than that of a father who knows that his child has won for herself the devoted affection of a good man?"

"And the thirty thousand pounds will be sunk for ever and ever in the firm of Hillary and Co.," the merchant may have thought at the close of that enthusiastic address.

Thus it was that Maude Hillary arrived at the very point towards which fate and her father had been pushing her for the last twelve months. After that passionate impulse of self-sacrifice had passed away, a dull dead feeling of pain took possession of her breast. Alone in the quiet of her own pretty rooms; alone through the long sunny July mornings with her books, and Berlin-wool work, and piano, she had only too much time to consider the step she had taken; she had only too much time to think of her broken vows, her scattered hopes. And she did think of these things,—with cruel remorse and self-upbraiding, with bitter and unavailing regret.

And now Francis Tredethlyn appeared to her all at once in a new light. Alas! he was no longer the noble-hearted friend to whom she could appeal for help in the day of trouble. He was no longer the humble adorer, kneeling on the lowest step of the altar, remote and submissive. He was her affianced husband, and he had a right to her society. He had a right to attend her in her walks and rides, to linger near the piano when

she sang, to hold perpetual skeins of Berlin-wool during those tedious morning visits which he made now and again to the Cedars. All these privileges were his by right; and other people gave place when he approached Miss Hillary, and watched to see her face brighten as he drew near her. It was not that Francis himself was in any way altered. His adoration of his bright divinity was no less humble than of old—even now when he knew that the goddess was to descend from her pedestal and exchange her starry crown for the orange-blossoms of an earthly bride. He was in no way changed; the distance between himself and Maude Hillary was as wide as ever. He could set it before him—a palpable gulf, across which he beheld her, a strange creature, in a strange land,—a creature who might hold out her hand to him once in a way across the impassable abyss, but who could never draw him near her. Alas for Francis Tredehlyn's loveless betrothal! that dreary distance was growing wider every day, now that Iphigenia knew the hour of sacrifice was drawing near.

It had been one thing to think of Mr. Tredehlyn as a friend—a dear and devoted friend, worthy to be regarded with an almost sisterly affection. It was another thing to contemplate him as a future husband. All his ignorance, his homely ways of speaking and thinking, his little awkwardnesses and stupidities, his vacillating temperament in the matter of spoons and forks at those elaborate Russian dinners,—all these things pained Maude Hillary now as cruelly as they had galled Miss Desmond's proud spirit some six months before. And then to the faint shivering pain of disgust was joined all the bitterness of contrast. Never had Harcourt Lowther's image seemed so near to this wayward girl as it seemed now, when she was the promised wife of another man, and tried most honestly to shut the memory of her old lover completely out of her mind. Never had he been so near to her. His graces of manner, his accomplishments, the light touch of his pointed fingers on the piano, the deep organ-tone that he alone amongst amateurs could draw out of a flute, the free outlines of his pencil, the transparency of his water-colour sketches, the graphic humour of his pen-and-ink caricatures; the airy wit, which never verged upon vulgarity; the fervid eloquence, which never degenerated into rant; the trenchant satire, which never sank to the vile level of personal spite: she thought of her discarded lover: and all the showy attributes that had won her girlish love arose before her in cruel contrast with the deficiencies of Francis Tredehlyn.

Yet all this time she was very kind to her betrothed husband. It was not in her to be scornfully indifferent to the man whom she regarded as her father's friend and benefactor. She was not a woman to sacrifice herself with an ill grace. The silent war-

sore went on within her breast. She struggled and suffered, but she had always the same kind, cold smile, the same gentle words for the man whom she had promised to marry.

And in the meantime the hands went steadily round upon all the clock-dials, and the inevitable hour drew very near. Busy milliners and dressmakers, bootmakers and outfitters, came backwards and forwards from Wigmore Street to the Cedars, and were busy and glad. Mr. Hillary's credit was unlimited, and it was almost as if a princess of the blood royal had been about to marry. Francis Tredethlyn bought the lease of a big black-looking house in a new neighbourhood near Hyde Park: and there were negotiations pending for the purchase of an estate within a few miles of Windsor.

August was melting into September. Already there were bright glimpses of red and yellow here and there among the sombre green of the woodlands. The wedding was to take place very early in October: the guests were bidden, the dresses of the bridesmaids were chosen, and in the still evening Iphigenia walked alone on the terrace. She was very seldom alone at this hour; but to-night her father had taken Francis Tredethlyn to a club-dinner, given by a bachelor stockbroker of some eminence in Mr. Hillary's circle. To-night Maude was alone; and leaning upon the broad balustrade, with her elbow resting amongst the thick ivy that crept along the stone, she looked down at the still water—the dark melancholy water—and thought of her past life.

It seemed so far away from her now, left so entirely behind—all that frivolous past. She seemed to have grown out of herself since the knowledge of her father's troubles had come upon her; and looking backwards she saw a careless and happy creature, who bore no relationship to this thoughtful woman, before whom all the future seemed a blank and dreary country, unillumined by one glimpse of sunshine.

She turned away from the water presently, and walked slowly up and down the long terrace. There seemed to be a melancholy influence in the evening stillness, the dusky shadow lying upon every object, the distant peal of bells floating across the river from some church where the ringers were practising; even the voices of passing boatmen and the low monotonous splash of oars took a pensive tone, in unison with the hour and Maude Hillary's sad remorseful thoughts.

She was near the end of the terrace, close to that ivy-grown old summerhouse which had sheltered the patched and powdered beauties of King George the Second's Court, when she was startled by the sound of a chain grating against stone-work, and rapid steps on the flight of stairs leading from the terrace to the river. The young men who came to the Cedars were very fond

of making the journey by water: so there was nothing strange in the sound of a step on the river stair. Maude turned to meet the intruder with a sense of weariness and vexation. He would not be likely to stay long, whoever he was; but the prospect of even ten minutes' idle conventional discourse jarred upon her present frame of mind.

She turned to meet the unwelcome visitor with a languid sigh, and saw a man hurrying towards her in the twilight; a man in whose figure and dress there was a careless grace, an undefinable air of distinction, which, in Maude Hillary's eyes, stamped him as different from all the rest of the world.

He came hurrying towards her. In a moment he was close to her, holding out his arms, eager to take her to his breast. But she recoiled from him, deadly white, and with her hands extended, motioning him back.

"Don't touch me," she cried; "don't come near me. Ah, you don't know—you cannot have had my letter."

"What letter?" cried Mr. Lowther, staring almost fiercely at the shrinking girl. These sort of things so rapidly make themselves understood. Harcourt Lowther saw at once that something was wrong. "What letter?"

"My last; the letter in which I told you that—Ah, how you will hate and despise me! But if you could know all, Harcourt, as you never can, you might excuse—you might forgive—"

A torrent of sobs broke the sentence.

"Oh, I think I understand," said Harcourt Lowther, very quietly. "You have thrown me over, Miss Hillary."

She held out her clasped hands towards him with an imploring gesture; and then in broken sentences, in half-finished phrases, that were rendered incoherent by her sobs, she recapitulated something of her letter of explanation. Mr. Lowther's face had blanched before this, and his lower lip quivered now and then with a little spasmodic action; but he listened very quietly to all Maude had to say.

"I ought never to have expected anything else," he answered, when she had finished her piteous attempt to explain and justify her conduct without revealing her father's commercial secrets. "I don't know that I ever *did* expect anything else," he went on very deliberately. "What has a penniless younger son to do among the children of Mammon? How can the earthen pot hope to sail down the stream with the big brazen vessels, and escape wreck and ruin? Don't let there be any scene between us, Miss Hillary; I hate all domestic tragedy, and I think if my heart were breaking—and men's hearts *have* been known to break—I could take things quietly. You have grown tired of our long and apparently hopeless engagement, and you have promised to

marry somebody else. It is all perfectly natural. May I know the name of my fortunate rival?"

"His name is Tredethlyn—Francis Tredethlyn."

"A Cornishman," added Harcourt Lowther,—"a fellow who has lately come into a great fortune?"

"Yes. You know him, then?"

"Intimately. I congratulate you on your choice, Miss Hillary. Francis Tredethlyn is a most excellent fellow. I have reason to speak well of him, for he was my servant for a year and a half cut yonder in Van Diemen's Land."

"Your servant?"

"Yes. He was really the best of fellows; and in the art of brushing a coat or cleaning a pair of riding-boots was positively unrivalled."

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### TAKING IT QUIETLY.

"If you could know all, Harcourt, as you never can, you might excuse—you might forgive——"

Harcourt Lowther, very quick of apprehension always, especially so where his own interests were concerned, had taken careful note of these broken sentences uttered by Maude Hillary, and, rowing Londonwards in the summer darkness, pondered on them long and deliberately, only arousing himself now and then from his sombre reverie, in order to express his profound contempt for some amateur waterman who was just saved from a foul by the superior skill of the young officer.

What did it mean? That was the question which Mr. Lowther set himself to answer.

"It means something more than the caprice of a shallow-hearted jilt," he thought, as he rested on his oars and lighted his cigar. "How pale she grew at sight of me! That white, agonized look in her face was real despair. 'If I could know all!' she said. All *what*? There's a mystery somewhere Maude Hillary is the last woman in the world to throw over a poor lover for the sake of a rich one. The sentimental girl, who was ready to keep her engagement with me at the sacrifice of her father's fortune, would scarcely marry a clownish rustic for the sake of his thirty thousand a year. Besides, these heiresses, who have never known what it is to have a wish denied them, are the most romantic creatures in creation, and cherish sublimely absurd ideas upon the sordid dross question. No, I cannot think that Maude would be influenced by any mercenary considerations—and yet how else——?"

The villas and villages on the river-banks flitted past him

like phantom habitations in the dim light. The flat shores of Battersea; the dingy roofs and chimneys of crowded Chelsea and manufacturing Lambeth; the bridges and barges; the low-lying prison, lurking like some crouching beast upon the swampy ground, shifted by as the oars dipped in the quiet water, while Harcourt Lowther's light wherry sped homeward with the tide. But all the length of his water-journey he could find no satisfactory answer to that question about Maude Hillary; and when he relinquished his boat to its rightful owner at a certain landing-place in Westminster, he was still undecided as to the meaning of those broken phrases which had dropped from the lips of the merchant's daughter in the first moment of surprise and emotion.

"I dare say it is only the old story after all," he thought, as he walked towards the Strand, in the purlieus of which he had taken up his quarters. "Lionel Hillary, being as rich as Croesus, is determined that no poor man shall profit by his daughter's fortune. Water runs to the river, and Maude's dowry will go to swell that old Cornish miser's savings. It's only my usual luck. I am engaged to a beautiful woman with a hundred thousand or so for a fortune, and I find a victorious rival in the man who cleans my boots."

But Mr. Lowther had not settled the question even yet. Lying awake and feverishly restless in his lodging in Norfolk Street, Miss Hillary's pale face was still before him, the sound of her imploring tones was perpetually in his ear.

"If I knew all, I might forgive, I might excuse!" There must have been some meaning in those words, some secret involved in them. Surely, if her father had forced this marriage upon her, after the manner of some tyrannical old parent in a stage-play,—surely, if that had been the case, she would have candidly told me the truth; she would have pleaded the best excuse a woman can have. There must be some secret reason for this marriage, and I must be a consummate fool if I fail in getting to the bottom of the mystery."

Mr. Lowther breakfasted early the next morning, and dressed himself with his accustomed neatness before going out. He had no body-servant now whom he could badger and worry when the world went ill with him; or that individual would most assuredly have paid the penalty of Miss Hillary's broken faith. Harcourt Lowther, the younger son, was too poor to keep or pay a valet. He had grown weary of waiting for promotion in the army, as he had sickened of hoping for advancement at the bar, and had sold his commission. The world was all before him now, as it had been seven years ago, when he had first looked about him for a profession. The world was all before him, and his one chance of fortune, the possibility of a marriage with Maude Hillary, seemed entirely lost to him. It was scarcely strange if

his spirits sank before the dismal blankness of the prospect which he contemplated that morning, as he loitered over his breakfast of London eggs and lodging-house toast and coffee.

He went out a little after twelve o'clock, hailed the first prowling hansom he encountered in the Strand, and ordered the man to drive to a certain street in the City, sacred to the stockbroking and money-making interests. Here he alighted, dismissed the cab, turned into a narrow court, still more entirely sacred to stockbroking, and entered a little office, where there was a desk, two or three horsehair chairs, a great many bills hanging against the wall, all relating to the stockbroking interests, and a six-foot screen of wooden panelling, dividing the small outer office from a larger inner office.

Mr. Lowther walked straight to this screen, and standing on tip-toe, looked over into the secnd office.

A gentleman with sandy whiskers, a light overcoat, and a white hat, was standing at a desk, and jotting some pencil memoranda upon the margins of a file of documents, which he was turning over with a certain rapidity and precision of touch peculiar to a man of business.

"Can you spare a quarter of an hour of your valuable time from the calculation of last year's prices for the Fiji Island Grand Junction Stock in order to devote it to the claims of friendship?" asked Mr. Lowther.

The clerks smiled as they looked up from their desks; and the gentleman in the white hat dropped his pencil, and ran to a little wooden door in the partition, over which Harcourt Lowther's hat made itself visible.

"My dear Lowther!" he exclaimed, presenting himself in the smaller office, and stretching out both his hands towards the intruder; "this *is* a surprise; I thought you were at the Anti-podes."

"Yes, that's the way of the world," answered Mr. Lowther, rather peeviously; "a man is banished to some outlandish hole at the remotest end of the universe, *ergo* he's never to return to the civilized half of the globe."

"But it seems only yesterday when——"

"And that's another cruel thing a man's friends say to him when he does turn up in the civilized hemisphere," interrupted Mr. Lowther. "'It seems only yesterday when you left us;' that is to say, life has been so pleasant and rapid for us, amidst all the gaieties and luxuries and successes of the most wonderful city in the world, that we are utterly unable to believe in the dreary months and years that you've had to drag out, poor devil, in your hole on the other side of the line. That's what a fellow's friends *mean* when they talk their confounded humbug about it's only seeming yesterday."

Harcourt Lowther's City friend was not the most brilliant or original of men when you took him away from the stockbroking interests. He stared blankly during Mr. Lowther's discontented remarks upon the selfishness of mankind.

"Haw! that's good. Meant no offence by allusion to yesterday; only meant that I was jolly glad to see you, you know, and so on. But, you see, a fellow turning up in the City when you've been given to understand that he's in Van Diemen's Land is rather a surprise, you know. Can I do anything for you? I'll tell you what, old fellow; I can put you up to a good thing in the Etruscan Loan,—panic prices,—nine per cent, and certain to turn up trumps in the long run."

Mr. Lowther smiled bitterly.

"Do you suppose that I've any money to invest; or that if I had money, I'm the sort of man to sink the glorious principal for the sake of some miserable dribblings in the way of interest? No, my dear Wilderson, you *can* do me a good turn, but it's in quite another direction. Just step this way."

He put his hand on his friend's shoulder, and led him to the door leading into the court. Here, safely out of the hearing of the clerks at work in the inner office, Mr. Lowther lowered his voice to a confidential tone.

"Wilderson," he said, "I think you know Lionel Hillary, the Australian merchant?"

"Hillary and Co.?" exclaimed Mr. Wilderson,—"I should flatter myself I did."

"I want you to tell me all about him—how he stands—how he has stood for some time past; in short, all you know about him."

The stockbroker pulled his hay-coloured whiskers thoughtfully, and shook his head.

"These sort of things are rather difficult to *know*," he said, "but a man *may* have his thoughts about 'em."

"And what are your thoughts? Hang it, man, speak out. You talked just now of being ready to serve me. You can serve me in this matter, if you choose."

Mr. Wilderson shrugged his shoulders, and again pulled his whiskers in a reflective mood.

"Dear boy," he said presently, "come out into the court."

Evidently in Mr. Wilderson's mind the court was as some primeval forest, wherein no listener's ears could penetrate.

Out in the court the stockbroker hitched his arm through that of Harcourt Lowther, and began to discourse upon Lionel Hillary, or Hillary and Co., as Mr. Wilderson preferred to designate him. He said a great deal in a low, confidential voice, and Harcourt Lowther's lower jaw fell a little as he listened. One thing was made clear to the ex-officer, and that was, that

Lionel Hillary's affairs had been hinted at by the knowing ones as rather shaky; that there had been even whispers of that awful word, "suspension;" but that somehow or other Hillary and Co. had contrived to right themselves; and that it was supposed by the aforesaid knowing ones that the Australian merchant had found a wealthy backer.

"There's fresh blood been let into his business, you may rely upon it, dear boy," said Mr. Wilderson. "I know that he was in Queer Street last Christmas. Bills referred to drawer, and that sort of thing. The bankers were beginning to get shy of his paper. I held a little of it myself, and a deuced deal of trouble I had to plant it."

This and much more to hear did Harcourt Lowther seriously incline. Then he asked Mr. Wilderson to dine with him at a certain noted establishment in the Strand, and left the court very grave of aspect and slow of step.

"So my lovely Maude is not a millionaire's daughter after all," he thought. "And my friend Hillary has been dipping his capacious paw into Francis Tredethlyn's purse. I ought to have known that half these reputed rich men are as rotten as a pear. So this is the explanation of my simple Maude's heroics. Poor little girl, *she* has been the pretty fly with which that accomplished angler, Mr. Hillary, has whipped the stream for his big gudgeon! Any little card I may have arranged to play for myself has been very neatly taken out of my hands; and I find my friend provided with a needy father-in-law and an extravagant wife. However, I dare say there's some small part left for me to play: and perhaps the best thing I can do is to take it quietly."

#### Harcourt Lowther's servant!

The man to whom Maude Hillary was now engaged had once been the valet of her discarded lover. This could scarcely be a pleasant thought to any young lady early imbued with all the ordinary prejudices of society. Miss Hillary was not a strong-minded woman; she could not console herself with a neat aphorism from Burns to the effect that "a man's a man for a' that," and to her Harcourt Lowther's revelation seemed cruelly humiliating. She had heard of young women in her own position marrying grooms, or perhaps even footmen, for love, and she had shuddered at the very idea of their iniquity. But was it not quite as degrading to marry a valet for money, as to elope with a groom for love?

"He blacked Harcourt's boots!" thought poor Maude; and it is impossible to describe the utter despair expressed in that brief sentence. She met her lover with a very pale face the next day, and, seating himself in his accustomed place by her em-

broidery frame, Francis Tredethlyn saw that there was something wrong. Alas ! poor—Francis, he had already learned to watch every change upon that beautiful face; already, before the marriage vows had been spoken, all the miserable tortures of doubt had begun to prey upon his devoted heart. She had promised to marry him, but she had not promised to love him. He remembered that. She had given herself to him in payment of her father's debt. She had sacrificed herself in accordance with the loyal instincts of her noble nature. Francis, generous and loyal himself, could understand this, much better than it was understood by Lionel Hillary, for whose sake the sacrifice was made.

There were times when the young man reproached himself for his selfishness in accepting the supreme desire of his soul. Ought he not rather to have wrestled with himself and let this bright young creature go? But there were other times when Francis Tredethlyn suffered himself to be beguiled by delicious hopes. Had not true and honest love sometimes triumphed over circumstance? Might not the day come when Maude Hillary would be able to return his affection, to reward his patience?

"I can afford to be so patient," he thought ; "for it will be such happiness to be her slave." To-day, watching her pale face in pensive contemplation, Francis puzzled himself vainly to guess what was amiss with his promised wife. It was not only that she was paler than usual,—and the brightness of her colour had faded very much of late,—but to-day, there was a shade of coldness in her manner which was quite new to her affianced husband, and which sent a chill to his heart, always ready to sink under some vague apprehension where Maude Hillary was concerned. We hold these supreme joys of life by so slender a thread, that half our delight in them is poisoned by the dread of their possible loss.

"Maude," he said by-and-by, after a few commonplace phrases, and after he had watched her for some minutes in silence, "I am sure there is something amiss with you to-day. You are ill—you—"

"Oh, no, not ill. Only a little worried."

"Worried—but about what?"

"I heard something about you last night, Mr. Tredethlyn," said Miss Hillary,—it was the first time she had called him Mr. Tredethlyn since their engagement,—"something which you never told me yourself. Mr. Lowther,—a friend of papa's, who has just come home from Van Diemen's Land, told me—that—that—you had been——"

"His servant! Yes, Maude, it is quite true. I was a soldier, and I was obliged to obey orders. I was ordered to attend upon Ensign Lowther, and I did my best to serve him well. When I

enlisted in her Majesty's service, I had all sorts of foolish fancies about fighting and glory, but they all dwindled down to the usual routine. No fighting, no glory, no desperate attacks upon Indian fortresses, no scaling walls to plant the British flag upon the enemy's ramparts; but any amount of drill and hard work, and a discontented fine gentleman to wait upon."

A flood of crimson rushed into Maude's face as Francis said this; but the young man's head was drooping over the embroidery frame, and he was trifling mechanically with the loose Berlin wool lying on Miss Hillary's canvas.

"I am afraid you think it a kind of degradation to you, that I should have been a servant, Maude?" he said presently.

"You never told me——"

"No—I told you I had been a private in the 51st. The other business was only a part of my duty."

Maude was silent for some moments after this. She sat looking dreamily out of the window, while Francis still twisted the Berlin wools in his strong fingers. Maude was the first to speak.

"Was it Mr. Lowther you meant just now, when you spoke of a discontented fine gentleman?" she asked, with some slight hesitation.

"Yes; I never served any other master. Ensign Lowther was horribly discontented. He was one of those men who can't take things easily; but I can understand a good deal of his peevish restlessness now. I can sympathize with him now, Maude."

His voice grew low and tender as he said this.

"Why?" asked Miss Hillary, rather coldly.

"He was in love, Maude,—an unhappy attachment, as I understood, to some lady—an heiress, I think—whose money was a hindrance to a marriage between them."

From the beginning to the end of this conversation Maude Hillary's thoughts had been employed in debating one question—should she, or should she not, tell her future husband that Harcourt Lowther was the man to whom she had been previously engaged? He knew of that broken engagement, but he did not know the name of her lover. Was it her duty to tell him? It would be very unpleasant to do so; but then duty is so often unpleasant. She was still silently debating this subject; the words which she should speak were forming themselves in her mind; when the drawing-room door was opened, and a servant announced Mr. Lowther. Maude's heart beat violently. Would there be a scene? Why had Harcourt come, when he knew? But Mr. Lowther very speedily relieved her fears upon this subject. Nothing could be more delightful than his manner. He was cordial to his old servant without attempting

any airs of patronage. He could not have been more entirely at his ease with Maude, had he been the most indifferent of first-cousins.

Mr. Lowther was only acting up to his determination to take things quietly. He had met Lionel Hillary in the City that morning, and had surprised the merchant by speaking of Maude's engagement to Francis Tredethlyn.

"But don't alarm yourself, my dear Hillary," he said with a frank smile. "To say that I adored, and do adore, your daughter, is only to admit a fact to which, I dare say, every male visitor at the Cedars would be happy to testify in a round-robin. Miss Hillary is made to be worshipped. I have only been one among a score of worshippers. If ever I hoped to overcome your very natural prejudice against my disgusting poverty, I have long ceased to hope it; so it was scarcely such a death-blow to me to discover what had happened during my exile. Will you let me renew my old relations with your household? Will you let me be one of the moths again? I know now that the candle will burn, and that its dangerous glare alone, and not its tender warmth, is reserved for me, so I shall have only myself to blame if I come away with a scorched wing."

Mr. Hillary's only reply to this rather sentimental speech was a hearty invitation to dinner.

"I can give you your favourite Rüdesheimer with the oysters. Chablis is a mistake, when you can get good hock. Sharp seven, remember; but you may go earlier if you care for croquet. I dare say you'll find Tredethlyn there."

"The poor fellow is very hard hit, I suppose?"

Mr. Hillary smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"I never saw such a devoted creature. Good day."

The merchant hurried off, and Harcourt walked slowly away, pondering as he went.

"A devoted creature. Yes, and there has been new blood let into the commercial anatomy of Hillary and Co. I dare say that poor devil Tredethlyn has been bled to a hideous extent."

The dinner at the Cedars went off very pleasantly. What dinner could fail to go off tolerably well, enlivened by Harcourt Lowther, when that gentleman cared to exercise his genius for making conversation? There were other guests at the merchant's round table; and after dinner people showed an inclination to stroll out of the lamplit drawing-room on to the dusky lawn, and down to the terrace, drawn perhaps by the magnetic influence of the river, which will be looked at.

It happened somehow—I suppose Mr. Lowther himself managed it—that he and Maude were left a little way behind the rest of the loiterers upon the twilit terrace. Ah! how

ividly in the memory of both arose the picture of a time long ago, when they had stood there side by side, by the same river, in a twilight calm like this, with the same star glimmering faintly in a low rose-tinted western sky! In Maude's breast that memory awakened cruel pangs of shame and remorse! In Harcourt Lowther's breast there was a strangely mingled feeling of bitterness and regret;—bitterness against the Destiny which had given him so few of life's brightest possessions; regret for the vanished time in which some natural earnestness, some touch of fresh and manly feeling, had yet lingered in his heart.

"Poor, simple, unworldly Maude," he thought, as he contemplated the girl's pale face, "what a penitent look she has! and yet if she knew——"

He smiled, and left the thought unfinished. Then, turning to Maude, he said, with a little touch of melancholy solemnity, worthy of Edgar Ravenswood himself, "Miss Hillary, let us be friends. If you can bury the past, so can I. We may yet strew sweet flowers of friendship on the grave of our dead love."

"And I really don't want to let Francis Tredethiva slip through my fingers altogether," Mr. Lowther added, mentally, as a sort of rider to that pretty little speech.

Maude looked at him with rather a puzzled expression.

"You are very generous," she faltered, embarrassed, and at a loss how to express herself, "but—don't you think it would be better for us—to—to say good-bye to each other—for ever? I—I—hope you will marry some one—worthy of you—some one who is less the slave of circumstances than I am. I want to do my duty to Mr. Tredethlyn—and I think it is a part of my duty to tell him of our broken engagement."

"My dear Miss Hillary, you would surely never do anything so foolish. Poor Francis is the best fellow in the world, but he is just the man to be ferociously jealous if he once got any foolish crotchet into his head. I have lived in the same house with him, remember, and must therefore know him better than you do. As for saying farewell for ever, and all that kind of thing, your eternal parting reads remarkably well in a novel, but it isn't practicable between civilized people who belong to the same rank of society. Georgina bids Algernon an irrevocable adieu on Tuesday morning, and there is burning of letters and love-locks, and weeping and wailing in Brompton Crescent; and on Wednesday evening the same Algernon takes her down to dinner in Westbourne Terrace. We can bury the past in as deep a grave as you like, and lay the ghost of memory with any exorcism you please, but we can't pledge ourselves not to meet ~~any~~ day in the week in the houses of our common friends."

Maude was quite unable to argue with so specious a reasoner

as Mr. Lowther. She did her best to defend her position, and urged the necessity of telling Francis Tredethlyn the whole truth. But Harcourt overruled her objections, and in the end obtained from her a promise that she would still remain silent as to the name of her discarded lover.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### TIDINGS OF SUSAN.

Absorbed in the conflicting tortures and delights of his bondage, Francis Tredethlyn had thought very little of that missing cousin who had once been so near and dear to him. Now and then, when he had been most entirely under the spell of Maude Hillary's fascinating presence, the vision of a rosy rustic face, framed in a little dimity bonnet, had arisen suddenly before him, mutely reproachful of his forgetfulness and neglect, and he had resolved that on the very next day some new steps should be taken in the search for Susan Tredethlyn. But then, on that next day, there was generally some flower-show or *matinée musicale*, some boat-race at Putney or appointment to play croquet at Twickenham; in short, some excuse or other for devoting himself to Maude Hillary; and poor Susan's rustic image melted away into chaos. But Mr. Tredethlyn was suddenly startled into recollection of his neglected duty by the receipt of a letter from his solicitors, Messrs. Kursdale and Scardon, asking for an early interview, and announcing that they had an important communication to make respecting Miss Susan Tredethlyn, otherwise Miss Susan Turner.

An important communication. The Cornishman felt his face grow hot as he read the letter. Susan was found, perhaps, he thought. He had never mentioned her name to Maude Hillary, and now it might be that she would need all the devotion of a loving protector, perhaps even the strong arm of an avenger, at a time when his every thought was absorbed by his approaching marriage. The young man did not wait for any ceremonious appointment, but hurried off at once to Gray's Inn, and presented himself before Mr. Kursdale, the senior partner.

In the quiet office Francis Tredethlyn's hot eagerness tamed down a little before the matter-of-fact manner of the solicitor. There was a sober tranquillity in the aspect of the man and of the place, which seemed to have a singularly soothing effect upon all human emotion. The sober little clock ticking on the grey stone mantel-piece—a skeleton clock, exhibiting its entire anatomy to the public eye, and superior to all meretricious adornment—seemed to be perpetually ticking out in the stillness:

"Let me advise you to take it easily; let me recommend you to take it quietly: whatever the Law can do for you will be done for you here; but it must be done in the Law's own way, which is very slow, and very complicated, and rather trying to human patience."

Mr. Kursdale received Francis with calm cordiality, and after a few stately compliments proceeded at once to business.

"You will remember that my opinion, and that of my partner—for I availed myself of his judgment in the matter,—you will, no doubt, recollect, that after considerable study of the manuscript or journal which you confided to me, I came to the conclusion that the writer of that journal had contemplated imposing upon your cousin's simplicity by a mock marriage, a sham ceremonial, performed before some person falsely representing himself to be a district registrar. This opinion was really forced upon me by the wording of the diary. Look at the diary in what light I would,—and I assure you I weighed the matter most carefully,—I could not see my way to any other conclusion."

"I understand," answered Francis. "I knew the man was a scoundrel. I made that out, somehow or other, from his journal. I knew he meant mischief and treachery upon little Susy; but I couldn't make out *what* treachery till you opened my eyes to the truth."

"But suppose that, after all my care, I was too hasty in forming a conclusion. Suppose that we have been mistaken, Mr. Tredethlyn?"

"How do you mean, sir?"

"Some days since, I happened to open a drawer which had been unopened for a long time, and hidden under a lot of other documents I found the diary which you entrusted to me. The sight of the manuscript reminded me of you and your missing cousin; so I suppose it was only natural that I should turn over the pages,—not in the hope of finding any new meaning in them, however, for I had studied them too carefully for that. I turned them over, and while debating the question of a mock marriage, the thought suddenly flashed upon me that it would be at least very easy to ascertain if any genuine ceremonial had taken place in London. Remember, Mr. Tredethlyn, I did not for one moment imagine that there *had* been a real marriage, and I fully believed that the trouble I was about to take would be wasted trouble. If I had not from the first been firmly convinced that the writer of the diary contemplated a sham marriage, and nothing but a sham marriage, I should, at the outset, have done that which I only did the other day."

Francis Tredethlyn's impatience was so very evident, that the

lawyer, slow as he generally was, quickened his pace a little as he went on.

"I was determined to institute an investigation of the books of every registrar's office in the metropolis during the months of January, February, and March, 1849. I entrusted a confidential clerk with this task, and three days afterwards he brought me the result of his investigation. On the 27th February, 1849, Robert Lesley was married to Susan Turner, in the office of the district registrar for Marylebone. The registrar's name was Joseph Pepper; the names of the witnesses were Mary Banks and Jemima Banks, of No. 7, Woolcote Villas, St. John's Wood."

"Thank God!" ejaculated Francis Tredehlyn, reverently. "Thank God, for my little Susan's sake, that this man was not the scoundrel we took him for."

"Whether such a marriage, contracted under a false name on your cousin's part, and it is very possible, also under a false name on the part of the writer of the diary,—whether such a marriage might not be open to dispute, is another question. However, the ceremonial, so far as it went, was genuine, and in any case there would be some little difficulty in setting it aside."

"It shall not be set aside!" cried Francis, "if I have the power to enforce it. Thank God for this, Mr. Kursdale, and thank you for the thought, late as it came, that led to the discovery of the truth."

"You must remember, though, my dear Mr. Tredehlyn," remonstrated the solicitor, who was almost alarmed by the young man's eagerness, "you must bear in mind that it is just possible there may have been some other Susan Turner and some other Robert Lesley married in the month of February, 1849, and that this registration may refer to them."

"I am not afraid of that," Francis answered, decisively. "No, the man meant to be a scoundrel, I dare say; but my little Susy's artless confidence touched his heart at the very last, perhaps, and he could not be such a villain as to deceive her. Rely upon it, Mr. Kursdale, the marriage was a genuine marriage, and I shall live to see my cousin righted, and to divide my uncle Oliver's money with her."

Mr. Kursdale stared at his client in blank amazement.

"You would—do that?" he asked, after a pause.

"Of course I would. Poor little ill-used darling! The money was hers, every penny of it, by right. I—I meant at first to have restored it all to her; but new claims have arisen for me, and I can only give her half the fortune that should have been her own."

The solicitor stifled a groan.

"And now how am I to find Susy?" asked Francis. "This registration business gives us a new clue, doesn't it?"

"Unquestionably. We can, at any rate, hope to find the two witnesses, Mary and Jemima Banks, and from them we may discover your cousin's present whereabouts. I'll send a clerk to these Banks people to-morrow."

"Do you know I think I'd rather go and look for them myself, and at once," said Francis. "I've been very neglectful of Susy's interests lately, and I feel as if I ought to do something to make up for my neglect. I'll go myself, Mr. Kursdale, and try to find out these people. If I fail, you must help me to find them. If I succeed, I'll come here to-morrow morning and tell you the result."

The young man wrote the address of the people in St. John's Wood in his pocket-book, shook hands with his legal adviser, and hurried away; he was so eager to atone for the neglect of the past by the activity of the present. He hailed a hansom in Holborn, and was on his way to St. John's Wood five minutes after he had left the lawyer's office. He sat with his watch open in his hand, while he made abstruse calculations as to the time it would take him to find the females, Mary and Jemima Banks, extort from them all the information they had to give, drive back to his hotel, reorganize his toilet, and then make his way to Twickenham. Mr. Tredethlyn had grown something of a dandy of late; he employed a West-end tailor, belaboured his honest head with big ivory-backed brushes, and bedewed his cambric handkerchief with the odorous invention of that necromancer of the flower-garden, Monsieur Eugene Rimmel. The big Cornishman smiled at his reflection in the glass sometimes, wondering at his own frivolity. But it was for Maude Hillary's sake that he brushed his hair laboriously every day, and grew critical in the choice of a waistcoat. He had even hired a man to wait upon him, and had a little regiment of boot-trees in his dressing-room.

St. John's Wood proper is perhaps one of the most delightful suburban retreats in which the man can make a pleasant temple for his *lares* and *penates*, who, yearning for the waving of green trees about his abode, is yet obliged to live within an easy cab-drive from the City. Dear little villas, embosomed in foliage; stately mansions, towering proudly out of half an acre of trimly-kept garden, invite the wealthy citizen to retirement and repose. The young lilacs and laburnums of to-day may represent but poorly the bosky verdures of the past, but still the Wood of St. John is a cool and pleasant oasis in the great arid desert of London.

But there are outskirts and dependencies of St. John that are not quite so pleasant,—ragged wastes and shabby little terraces,

that hang like tattered edges disgracing a costly garment. These dismal streets and dreary terraces may not belong of right to St. John, but they hang about him, and cling to him, and shelter themselves under the grandeur of his name, nevertheless.

Woolcote Villas, St. John's Wood, were very pretentious little dwelling-places, fronted with damp stucco, and with a tendency to a mossy greenness of aspect that was eminently dispiriting. Woolcote Villas were of the Elizabethan order of architecture, and went off abruptly into peaks and angles wherever a peak or an angle was possible. How such small houses could require the massive stacks of Elizabethan chimneys which made Woolcote Villas appear top-heavy and incongruous to the eye of the stranger, was an enigma only to be solved by the architect who designed those habitations; and why Woolcote Villas should each be finished off with a stuccoed mustard-pot, popularly known as a campanello tower, which was not Elizabethan, and not practicable for habitation, being open to the four winds of heaven, was another problem perpetually awaiting the same individual's solution.

The hansom cabman, after driving through all the intricacies of St. John's Wood on different false scents, came at last upon Woolcote Villas, through the friendly offices of a milkman, and pulled up his horse before the door of No. 7.

Francis alighted and rang a bell,—a bell with a slack wire, which required to be pulled a great many times before any effect was produced. At last, however, the bell rang; and then, after a pause and another peal, the door was opened, and a slip-shod servant-maid, with a flapping circle of dirty net hanging from the back of her disorderly head, emerged from No. 7, Woolcote Villas, and presented herself at the little gate before which Francis Tredethlyn was waiting.

The young man asked if Mrs. Banks was at home. Yes, she was at home, and Miss Banks also. Did he please to want the apartments?

Mr. Tredethlyn told her that he had particular business with Mrs. Banks, and that it was that lady whom he wished to see. The girl looked disappointed. There were a good many bills in the Elizabethan windows of Woolcote Villas, and the demands of lodgers were not equal to the supply of furnished apartments.

The sound of a tinkling piano, played very badly, greeted Mr. Tredethlyn as he entered the narrow passage. The dirty maid-servant opened the door of the apartment whence the sound came, and Francis found himself in a shabby parlour, tenanted by a young lady, who rose from the piano as he entered, and who was very fine and yet very shabby, and a trifle dirty, like the parlour, and like Woolcote Villas generally. The young

lady wore a greasy-looking black silk, relieved by a coquettish little apron of Stuart plaid, and adorned by all manner of ribands and narrow velvets, with a good deal of Mosaic jewelry in the way of hearts and crosses, and anchors and lockets; and her hair was turned back from her forehead, and flowed in graceful ringlets of the corkscrew order upon her stately shoulders. She was altogether a very extensively adorned young lady; and she gave a little start expressive of surprise and timidity, with just a slight admixture of pleasure, as Mr. Tredethlyn presented himself before her. Many single gentlemen had inspected the long-vacant lodgings; but there had been no one among them so good-looking, or so splendid of aspect, as this tall, broad-shouldered Cornishman, revised and corrected by his West-end tailor.

"The apartments, I suppose," the young lady said, curtseying and simpering. "My ma being busy, perhaps you will allow me to show them to you? *This* is the parlour. If the use of a sitting-room only is required, *with* partial board, including dinner on Sundays, the terms would be seventeen and sixpence. Private apartments, without board, fifteen shillings, or with full board——"

The young lady would have proceeded further, but Francis Tredethlyn interrupted her.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "I don't require apartments; my business is quite of a different nature. Your name is Banks, I believe?"

The lady inclined her head graciously. Life was very dreary in Woolcote Villas, and the advent of a good-looking stranger could scarcely be otherwise than agreeable, even if he was not a prospective tenant.

"Mary—or Jemima—Banks?" asked Francis.

"I am Miss Jemima Banks," the young lady replied, with considerable dignity. She began to think the good-looking stranger inclined to be presumptuous; but Francis was too pre-occupied to be aware of the intended reproof.

"I am very glad that I have been so fortunate as to find you," he said, "for I believe you can give me the information I want. You were present at a marriage before the registrar, at an office in Folthorpe Street, Marylebone, on the 27th of February, 1849. Can you tell me where the young lady who was married went after the ceremony? I have some right to ask this question, for Susan Tre—Susan Turner is my first-cousin."

"Well, I never did!" exclaimed Miss Banks, surprised out of her stateliness. "Poor Susan was your cousin, was she? Why, she came home here a fortnight after her marriage."

"She came here?"

"Yes, she was lodging here before that; and she and her

husband went off to Paris after the ceremony; and there was no breakfast and no nothing; and Mr. Lesley, he was always very high and mighty-like in his ways—he flung down a twenty-pound note upon the desk before the registrar, and when the man said something about change, he threw up his head scornful-like—it was a way he had if anything vexed him,—‘There’s your money,’ he said, ‘and don’t let’s have any humbug;’ and then he dragged his poor little wife’s hand through his arm, just nodded to me and mother, and walked off to the cab without a word, leaving me and mother in the registrar’s office. The registrar was full of praises of the gentleman’s generosity, and said he’d like to tie up a half-a-dozen such couples every week; but mother was regularly cross about that twenty-pound note, and went on about it all the way home, saying that Mr. Lesley had ground her down close enough about the rent for these rooms, and needn’t go showing off his generosity to strange registers.”

“And my cousin Susan went to Paris?”

“Yes, but only for a fortnight, and we was to keep the apartments for her, which we did; and at the end of a fortnight she came back, dressed beautiful, and with all sorts of lovely things in her boxes, and she was looking so well and so happy, and anybody would have thought she was the luckiest woman in the world. But mother, she used to shake her head about it, and say she never knew those secret sort of marriages to come to any good, because when a gentleman begins by not wanting to own his wife, he’s very apt to end by wishing he hadn’t married her. But mother always looks at the black side of things, whether it’s taxes, or whether it’s lodgers, or whatever it is; so I didn’t take much notice. Mrs. Lesley seemed very happy; and Mr. Lesley, for the first week or so, he stopped at home a great deal, and scarcely ever went out, except to take his wife out to dine, or to a theatre, or something of that kind; and they really seemed the happiest couple that ever was; but by-and-by Mr. Lesley went away,—to college, his wife told me; and I shall never forget how she cried, poor thing, the night he left her, and how lonely she looked sitting in this room, where they’d been so happy together, with their little oyster-suppers after the theatre, and everything that heart could wish. She’d got some books that he’d left behind him spread out before her on the table, and she was turning one of them over when I went in to see her.

“‘They’re very hard to understand, Miss Banks,’ she said; ‘but I try to read them, because I want to be clever, and able to talk to Robert when he comes home.’

“After this she was almost always reading, poor little thing, and she’d sit in this room for days and days together; for she

didn't like to go out alone, and mother does drive and worry so, that it wasn't often I could get out with her. Mr. Lesley was to be away three months, she told me; and I'm sure that poor thing used to count the hours and minutes almost, wishing the time to go: but when the three months was up, there was no Mr. Lesley; he was going fishing, somewhere in Wales, with some grand friends she told me, and wouldn't be home till the next vacation. I never saw any one so cut up as she was by the disappointment, though she wouldn't talk about it; only I could see every morning by her face, that she'd been lying awake half the night, crying her poor eyes out."

"Poor girl, poor girl!" murmured Francis Tredethlyn.

This all-absorbing passion called love was a sorrowful thing, then, he thought, let it come to whom it would—a one-sided frenzy, a perpetual sacrifice, a self-imposed immolation.

"Pray tell me all you can about my cousin," he said to Miss Banks. "You cannot imagine how anxious I am to hear of her."

"I'm sure she and me was always the best of friends," answered the fair Jemima, with a touch of diplomacy; "and if you *did* think of taking the apartments, me and mother would do all in our power to make you comfortable, if it was only on Mrs. Lesley's account; for she was one of the sweetest young creatures I ever knew. She stayed with us three weeks before she was married; and I never shall forget her pretty face the day she first came up from the country after the lodgings had been took for her."

"Mr. Lesley engaged the lodgings, I suppose?"

"No, it was Mr. Lesley's brother."

"Oh, he had a brother, then?"

"Yes, his brother was something in the law, I think—a very nice gentleman, and almost the living image of Mr. Lesley himself."

"Can you give me a description of Mr. Lesley? I never saw him, and I want very much to know what kind of man he is."

Miss Banks hesitated for some moments.

"It's so difficult to give an exact description of any one," she said. "Mr. Lesley was a tall, handsome-looking man, with fair hair and blue eyes. I don't think I could describe him any nearer than that."

Francis Tredethlyn sighed. There are so many tall, handsome-looking men with fair hair and blue eyes! and it is chiefly in melodrama that people go about the world conveniently marked with a strawberry or a coronet.

"Answer me one question," said Francis, eagerly, "before you tell me the rest of my cousin's history. Do you know where she is now?"

Miss Banks shook her head, and sighed despondently.

"No more than you do, sir," she exclaimed. "It's two years and a half ago since I set eyes upon Mrs. Lesley, and I don't know no more than the dead what's become of her since."

"Then she's as much lost to me to-day as she was yesterday," said Francis, sadly. "But you can at least tell me all you know of my poor cousin. It may help me to some clue by which to find her."

Jemima was evidently a good-natured girl. She begged Mr. Tredehlyn to be seated, and placed herself opposite to him.

"I'll call mother if you like," she said; "but I think I can tell you more about Mrs. Lesley; mother is such a one to wander, and when one's anxious to know anything quick, it don't do to have to deal with a person whose mind's always harping upon lodgers and their ways. Of course everybody knows lodgers are tiresome, and nobody lets apartments for pleasure, and nobody would pay taxes if they could help it, and poor-rates are not expected to raise people's spirits; but if facts are disagreeable, that's no reason you should have them cropping up promiscuous in every style of conversation. Till now it used to be a relief to me to come and sit with Mrs. Lesley of an evening, and hear *her* troubles, if it was only for the sake of a change."

"I thank you heartily for having been good to my cousin," Francis said, earnestly. He was thinking that he would drop into a jeweller's shop on his way homeward, and choose the handsomest diamond ring in the man's stock for Miss Jemima Banks.

"I don't know as I deserve any thanks, sir," answered the girl. "I couldn't help taking to Mrs. Lesley, and I couldn't help feeling for her when I saw her so solitary and so sad. Months and months went by before her husband came back to her; and when he did come her baby was born, and there was the cradle in the corner just by where you're sitting, and she seemed as if she couldn't make enough of the child."

"A child!" murmured Francis. "Mrs. Burfield never told me of the child."

"But Mr. Lesley, he didn't seem so wrapped up in the baby as she did," continued Miss Banks; "and I used to fancy she saw it, and fretted about it. He couldn't take her out to dinner anywhere this time, nor yet to the theatre, on account of the child. She asked him once to take her for a drive somewhere in the country, and to take the child with them; but he laughed at her, and said, 'I don't think there's a pleasanter sight in creation than an estimable mechanic in his Sunday clothes, with three children in a wicker chaise, and a fourth in arms; but don't you think we may as well leave that sort of thing to

the mechanic, Susy? the poor fellow has so few chances of distinguishing himself.' That was just the sort of speech Mr. Lesley was always making, half laughing, half scornful; he was always going on in a sneering way about the baby, and her being so fond of it, and devoting herself so much to it; and sometimes one of those nasty speeches of his would set his wife off crying, for her health wasn't very strong just then, and any little thing would upset her. And then he'd look at her with a hard, cruel look what he'd got sometimes, and throw his book into a corner, and get up and walk out of the house, banging the door to that degree that mother would be unnerved for the rest of the evening. Mr. Lesley took to stopping out very late this time, and used to let himself in with a latch-key, long after me and mother had gone to bed; but I know that Susan used to sit up for him, and I know that he used to be angry with her for doing it; for Woolcote Villas are slight-built, and I've heard him talking to her as I lay awake overhead. He was at home for some months this time off and on,—but he'd be away for days together,—and when he was at home he had a tired way like, that made me feel uncomfortable somehow to see him. He was always yawning, and smoking, and sitting over his books, or lying asleep upon the sofa; and I'm sure if I'd been Mrs. Lesley, I should have been very glad when he took himself off. But, Lor' bless your heart! poor little thing, she fretted about his going away, just as if he'd been the kindest of husbands. He wasn't going back to college any more; he was going to Germany this time. I know she wanted to go with him, poor, tender-hearted thing; and I heard her say to him, so pitiful like, once, 'Oh, Robert, what will become of me when you are gone! If you would only take me!' But he only laughed at her, and cried out, 'What! abandon the baby?' So at last the time came for him to go, and his poor wife got paler and paler every day, till I'm sure she looked like a living corpse walking about the house," said Miss Banks, unconsciously paraphrasing Shelley.

"And this man left her?"

"Lor', yes, what did he care for her looking white and sorrowful? He was more wrapped up in his new portmanteaus, and travelling-bags, and dressing-cases, and such-like, than in his wife or his child. He went off as gay as could be, though he left Mrs. Lesley almost broken-hearted. And he didn't leave her too well off either, I know, though she always paid mother to the moment; but all her pretty dresses and bonnets that Mr. Lesley had bought her in Paris had grown shabby, and he hadn't bought her any new ones. He had so many expenses, she told me; for she was always making excuses for him like, and pretending that he was very good to her. Poor dear thing!

after he was gone away the baby was her only comfort; and I'm sure if it hadn't been for that child she'd have fretted herself away into the grave. Well, sir, the baby was four months old when Mr. Lesley went away to Germany, and he was only to be away three months at the longest, Susan told me: she was very friendly with me, and I always called her Susan. And she used to count the days just as she did before; and she'd say to me often how the time was going, and her husband would soon be back. She used to write him letters,—such long letters, all full of her talk about the baby, and his taking notice, and growing, and such-like; but she didn't have many letters from him. 'You see, Jemima, he's always going from place to place,' she said; 'and then my letters lie at the post-offices where I direct them, and half the time he doesn't receive them at all; so I can't wonder at not hearing very often from him.' She used to be so pleased, poor dear, when a letter did come, though I'm sure they were short enough, for I've seen her open them; but, ah! when the three months went by, and Mr. Lesley didn't come back, how dreadfully she did fret!—always secretly, though; for she didn't seem to like that anybody should know her troubles, for fear they should blame him, the brute! 'He's going farther north,' she told me; 'Germany's such a big country, you know, Jemima; and I'm afraid, from what Robert says, he thinks of going beyond Germany, to St. Petersburg, perhaps. You see, it's necessary for him to travel in order to complete his education.' I couldn't help laughing outright at this; for I thought if Mr. Lesley wasn't educated enough with all his books, and colleges, and crackjaw languages, and such-like, he never would be educated. However, that was no business of mine, and I kept my thoughts to myself. The time went by, and still there was no news of Mr. Lesley coming home. He was always going farther and farther north, Susan told me, when she spoke of him; but she'd got to talk of him very little now, though I know she was thinking of him and fretting about him all day and all night too: for I've slept with her sometimes, and heard her moan in her sleep, and speak his name, oh, so pitiful!"

"Poor girl! poor child! she was little more than a child!" murmured Francis Tredeithlyn.

"No more she was," answered Miss Banks, with energy; "and him as ill-treated her was a brute. I'm sure I never thought much of him, with his scornful, sneering ways, treating me and mother as if we were so much dirt under his feet. As for that poor young thing, it was a sorrowful day for her when she first set eyes upon him, fine gentleman though he was, and above her in station, which she was always telling me as a kind of excuse for his bad conduct. Well, sir, his letter,

got fewer and fewer, and still Susan kept her troubles to herself, and only said he was going farther north, and that he would be back before the year was out. But the year passed, and he didn't come back, and he'd been away nearly ten months, and the baby was fourteen months old, when a letter came for Susan, with St. Petersburg on the post-mark. I never shall forget that day. It was dull, cold, March weather, with the wind howling and moaning enough to give the liveliest person the dismals, and Mrs. Lesley had been sitting by the window all the afternoon watching for the postman. She was beginning to be nervous about her husband's health, she told me, as it was so long since she had heard from him. The postman came at last, and I was down-stairs with mother when he came. Mrs. Lesley ran into the passage, and took the letter herself. We heard the parlour door shut, and then five minutes afterwards we heard a scream and a heavy fall. Me and mother rushed up-stairs, and there was poor Susan lying on the floor, with a letter clutched in her hand, and the fingers clenched upon it so that neither me nor mother could loosen them. We lifted her up and laid her on the sofa. She didn't seem to have fainted dead away, for she opened her eyes directly, and said, 'Oh, why didn't you let me lie there till I died?' And it was enough to pierce the hardest heart to hear her. Mother began talking about the troubles of the world, and asked her if there was bad news in the letter. 'Oh, yes!' she cried; 'cruel news—dreadful news!' And then mother asked her, Was Mr. Lesley dead? 'Yes,' she said, 'dead to me! dead to me!' Mother fancied she meant he was really dead, and said she hoped Mrs. Lesley was left comfortably provided for. You see, having seen a deal of trouble herself, mother will look at things in that light. And then Susan cried out that her trouble was one that we could never understand. I couldn't bear to leave her; but I got mother out of the way,—for her ways are apt to be wearing to any one that's in trouble,—and I stopped with Susan all the evening. But she never spoke once; she only lay quite quiet on the sofa, with her face turned to the wall; but I knew that she was crying all the time; and when I took her the baby, thinking the sight of him might comfort her, she only waved him away like with her hand. I didn't leave her till twelve o'clock that night; but she was still lying on the sofa with her face turned to the wall. But just as I was going away she stretched out her hand and said, 'God bless you, Jemima! it is very good of you to stop with me, but there is nothing upon this wide earth that can give me any comfort now.' I didn't see her the next morning, for she went out very early, and took the baby with her, and she didn't come back till late at night, and then she came back without the baby. You

might have knocked me down with a feather when I opened the door to her and saw her come in without the child. ‘Oh, Susan,’ I said, ‘what have you done with Robert?’—he’d been christened Robert after his ‘pa, and I’d stood godmother for him. Susan was as pale as death, but she said very quietly, ‘I’ve put him out to nurse in the country, Jemima. I was obliged to part from him, for I’m going away.’ I thought all in a moment that she was going abroad to her husband, and that her grief had been about parting with her child; but then I remembered what she’d said the night before, about Mr. Lesley being dead to her, and do what I would I couldn’t make it out. I’m sure I was as much cut up at the thought of her going away as if she had been my own sister.”

“I wish to Heaven she had stopped with you!” exclaimed Francis Tredehlyn. “She had few friends, poor girl, and had no need to leave any one who felt kindly towards her.”

“But she did leave us,” replied Miss Banks; “she paid mother every farthing she owed her, and packed up her few little things. She would make me take some of her pretty ribands and collars that had been bought in Paris, and never worn out, for she didn’t care to dress herself smart when Mr. Lesley was not at home; and then she sent for a cab, and went away. I heard her tell the driver Shoreditch railway station, for I ran out to the cab and kissed her the last thing, and begged her to come and see us whenever she came back to London; and she promised that if she lived, and things went well with her, she would. But from that day to this we’ve never set eyes upon her.”

And this was the end of what Miss Banks had to tell. Francis Tredehlyn’s thoughts wandered back to Mrs. Burfield; it was to her that Susan Tredehlyn had gone in the March of 1851. So far the girl’s history was complete; but the grand question still remained, Where was she now to be found? A deserted wife, a friendless and perhaps penniless mother; what had become of this lonely, inexperienced girl between the March of 1851 and this present autumn of 1853?

“But surely you can give me some clue by which I may trace my cousin?” said Francis, after a pause; “you can give me the address of some friend, some intimate acquaintance of Mr. Lesley’s: he must have had visitors while he lived here.”

Jemima shook her head decisively.

“Not one,” she answered: “except for bringing his brother home to dinner once or twice, when he was first married, no mortal belonging to Mr. Lesley ever darkened mother’s doors. Mother and me used to think it odd; and of course there always are advantages in lodgers keeping much company, which makes up for extra trouble; and the most audacious lockers-up that

ever were can't go and lock-up under visitors' very noses. But we supposed, as Mr. Lesley's marriage was a secret one, he didn't care to bring his friends home."

"But his brother came?"

"Yes, only when they were first married; he never came after."

"Did you hear the brother's address?"

"Well, I have heard that it was in some of those law-places, the Temple, or Gray's Inn; but I never heard any nearer than that."

Mr. Tredethlyn gave a despairing sigh; he thought of Mrs. Burfield's description of his cousin, pale and wan, waving her little hand out of the carriage-window as she left Coltonslough, friendless and poor. Was it not more than likely that she had only gone away to die, and that his search for her would end at last in the discovery of a grave?

But might not the man, the husband who had deserted his innocent and confiding wife, might not he be found and made to pay a heavy penalty for his sins? Vengeance seems but a poor thing at the best, but it is at least something; and Francis Tredethlyn felt a fierce desire for revenge against the cold-blooded destroyer of his cousin Susan's happiness.

He asked Miss Banks many more questions; but she could tell him no more than she had already told him. She had never heard anything of Mr. Lesley's family or antecedents, directly or indirectly. She knew he went to college, but she never remembered hearing what college. She had fancied sometimes that Mr. Lesley's name was an assumed one; indeed, she was sure it was; for when his brother had come to dine at Woolcote Villas the first time, he had inquired for Mr. Robert by some other name. Unfortunately, that other name had entirely escaped Miss Jemima's recollection.

"He caught himself up short," she said, "as if he was vexed with himself for having let slip that other name, and I never heard it again the whole time Mr. and Mrs. Lesley were with us. I don't think Susan knew much more about her husband's affairs than I did, for he always treated her like a child; and even when he was kindest to her, he seemed to have a high and mighty way with her, that would have kept any timid person from asking questions."

Francis thanked Miss Banks very heartily for the trouble she had taken to enlighten him to the extent of her power, and then bade her good afternoon.

"If you should meet with any one wanting apartments and board, either partial or entire, you'll perhaps be kind enough to bear mother in mind," the young lady said, as she escorted him to the door. He murmured some polite assurance that he

would neglect no opportunity of promoting Mrs. Banks's interest, and returned to the hansom, which had been waiting for him during his prolonged interview with the good-natured Jemima.

From Woolcote Villas he drove to the office of the Marylebone registrar, and from that official he obtained an assurance that the marriage between Robert Lesley and Susan Turner, on the 27th of February, 1849, was, so far as his part of the business went, as legally binding as if the ceremony had been performed by the Archbishop of Canterbury within the solemn precincts of Westminster Abbey.

"If they chose to be married in false names, that was their business," said the registrar, "and they might find themselves bothered about it by-and-by. But, except where there's property, it isn't often that a person's called upon to prove his marriage. I suppose, by your making the inquiry, there *is* property in this case?"

Francis Tredethlyn shook his head.

"I know no more about that than you do," he said.

"Well, I shan't forget that business in a hurry," said the registrar, who was inclined to be communicative. "In the first place, the man was one of your regular tip-top swells, and that's a kind of party we don't often see here; and in the next place, he gave me a twenty-pound note, which was the first windfall of that kind that ever dropped into my pocket, and is more than likely to be the last."

"Can you tell me what the man was like?"

"Tall and fair, with blue eyes and light hair; your regular swell: not the heavy military swell,—more of a delicate womanish way with him; but such as you may see by the dozen any afternoon in St. James's Street or Pall Mall."

This description was no clearer than that given by Jemima Banks. Francis could scarcely walk through a London street without meeting with some man who might be described in the same words. He left the registrar's office, and went back to his hotel; and, absorbed in the arduous duties of his toilet, thought alternately of lost Susan Tredethlyn, *alias* Susan Lesley, and of beautiful Maude Hillary, who was so soon to be his wife.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### FRANCIS TREDETHLYN'S DISINTERESTED ADVISER.

SHE was so soon to be his wife! Yes, October was near at hand. Already the woods and hills beyond the Star and Garter were bright with autumnal tints of vivid orange and glowing crimson. The milliners and dressmakers, the outfitters

and bootmakers, were perpetually appearing in the hall and on the staircases at the Cedars. Wicker baskets covered with oilskin seemed continually passing in and out of Mr. Hillary's abode, and Maude could rarely enjoy a quiet half-hour undisturbed by a mysterious summons, entreating her to inspect or try on some garment newly brought home by a "young person" from town. Harcourt Lowther made himself quite at home both at the Cedars and at Francis Tredethlyn's chambers during this period of preparation. Francis took very kindly to his old master in his new capacity of friend and mentor. The habits of the past made a link between them. The old half-friendly, half-supercilious familiarity which had characterized Harcourt Lowther's treatment of his servant melted now into a playful and almost caressing friendliness. Mr. Lowther was a thoroughly selfish man, and he found himself called upon in this instance to sacrifice his pride in the cause of his interest. He affected a hearty interest in Francis Tredethlyn's affairs, and contrived somehow, by a series of manceuvres, so subtle as to be imperceptible, to install himself in the post of chief adviser to the inexperienced young Cornishman. Mr. Lowther was an idle man, a very clever man, too versatile for greatness, or even for any celebrity beyond that species of drawing-room reputation, which women are able to bestow on the men who are not too noble to waste a lifetime in small accomplishments and shallow courtesies. He was very clever, very idle, very much inclined to quarrel with the decrees of Providence; and in Francis Tredethlyn he saw the possessor of the two things he himself most ardently desired—a great fortune, and Maude Hillary for a wife. But he was true to his resolution to take matters quietly; and he assisted in the preparations for the wedding with as much outward show of pleasure as if he had been a match-making mother rejoicing in the happy disposal of a whole brood of daughters. The big mansion in the new district of palatial streets and squares lying between Kensington and Brompton was fitted and furnished under Mr. Lowther's superintendence. He had meetings with architects, gilders, decorators, and upholsterers; and, with only an occasional reference to Francis, gave his orders as freely as if the house had been his own. Sometimes, walking up and down the whole length of the three drawing-rooms, a strange smile flickered over his face,—a contemplative smile, which faded away in the next moment, giving place to that perfection of fashionable indifference to all things in heaven and earth which was his ordinary expression.

The appointed day came at last, and poor Francis drove down to Twickenham, looking as pale as his light waistcoat, but supported by his friend Harcourt Lowther as best man. Once, and

once only, Maude Hillary looked at her discarded lover while she remained Maude Hillary; but there was a world of mingled scorn and reproach in that one look. Ah, how different his love must have been from hers! she thought. Had he forsaken her for a wealthier bride, she would have gone far away from the sound of his wedding bells, and the sight of his wedding finery. In that one look she had seen that he was almost as pale as the bridegroom; but she could not forgive him for being there.

There was all the usual business. Autumnal flowers scattered under the feet of the bride and bridegroom; charity children in clean pinafores cheering in shrill treble voices as the bridal carriage drove away; and then a breakfast, and the popping of champagne corks, and the creaming of delicately perfumed Moselle, and a little speech-making of the mildest character; and then a departure amidst all the confusion of a crowded hall and portico—young-lady intimates pressing forward to caress the bride; loud-voiced young men congratulating the bridegroom; servants with white favours standing on tip-toe to get a peep at the show: and then the postillions crack their whips, and the carriage rolls away through the chill autumn evening; and Maude sees Twickenham town spin by her in a dim glimmer of comfortable firelight, twinkling redly in cottage windows.

The wedding tour had been amongst the many things which Harcourt Lowther had kindly undertaken to plan for his friend; and after a great deal of deliberation, that gentleman had pitched upon one of the dullest and quietest watering-places in Devonshire, as the one spot upon all this earth best suited for Mr. Tredethlyn and his bride.

" You don't want the stereotyped Continental tour ;—the Rhine steamers are crowded with cockneys, who find it easier to spout ' Childe Harold ' than to regulate the administration of their h's. What do you know about the castled crag of Drachenfels, dear boy? and what do you care for all the hackneyed sentimentality about beery old knights and battered old castles? You don't speak any language but your honest native tongue, and you would be bothered out of your life before your travels were over unless you took a courier—and then imagine seeing nature through the eyes of a courier! No, my dear Tredethlyn ! the sort of thing for you is some quiet little watering-place,—' an humble cot, in a tranquil spot, with a distant view of the changing sea,' and all that sort of thing; in other words, a tranquil little retreat where you and Mrs. Tredethlyn may have time to get acquainted with one another."

Francis was only too glad to take such pleasant advice. To be alone with Maude, alone beside the still grey sea in the quiet

autumn evenings, seemed to him the highest bliss that earth could hold for any human being: and poor Francis blessed his generous friend for the sound judgment which was to secure him such happiness.

"I dare say I should have gone scampering all over the Continent but for you, Lowther," he said, innocently. "Those other fellows at the Cedars advised a tour through half Europe: 'See plenty of life,' they said; 'freshen yourself up with change of scene, and pick up all the jargon you can out of Murray, so as to be able to hold your own in society. Everybody travels nowadays, and it doesn't do for a fellow with lots of tin to be behind the rest of the world.' But I'll take your advice, Lowther. I wanted Maude to choose the place for our bridal trip, but she wouldn't; so we'll go to the Devonshire village."

It is not to be supposed, of course, that Mr. Lowther had any other than the most friendly intention when he selected Combe Western as the scene of Francis Tredethlyn's honeymoon; but, on the other hand, it must be confessed that had Harcourt wished to inspire Maude with a weariness of her husband's society, he could have scarcely selected any place better calculated to assist him in the carrying out of his design. At Combe Western, the misty autumn days were unbroken by any change, save the slow changes of the hours and the gradual darkening of the sky. There were pleasant drives and romantic scenery to be found in the neighbourhood of Combe Western; but Devonshire is a rainy county, and as it rained with little intermission during the whole of that honeymoon period, Francis Tredethlyn's bride was compelled to find her chief amusement in the prim lodging-house drawing-room and the society of her husband.

And this society was not congenial to her. He was handsome, and pleasant to look at; manly, good-tempered, generous. No mean or unworthy sentiment ever dropped from his lips. She respected him, and was grateful to him; nay, even beyond this, there was a certain latent affection for him lurking in some corner of her heart; but she was very tired of him nevertheless. To be truly attached to a person, and desperately weary of them, is not altogether an impossibility. Are we not sometimes weary of ourselves, whom we yet love so dearly? When you get tired of a book, you have nothing to do but close the volume and restore it to its shelf. But you cannot shut up your friend when he becomes tedious; you must needs go on, wading through page after page of his conversation, till you yawn in his face, and arouse him to the unpleasant conviction that he is a nuisance.

Maude was very gratefully and affectionately disposed to-

wards her father's benefactor; but she grew terribly tired of his sole companionship during that rainy six weeks in the quiet Devonian watering-place. If the bride and bridegroom had gone on that stereotyped foreign tour so strongly protested against by Harcourt Lowther, Maude's sunny nature would speedily have asserted itself. She would have found in the rapid changes of scene, in all the pleasant excitement of quick travelling, plenty of subject-matter for conversation with her new companion; there would have been always some common ground on which they could have met, some little incident, among the hundred incidents of a traveller's day, which would have aroused a sympathy between them. But thrown on their own resources at Combe Western, a Horace Walpole and a Madame du Deffand might have exhausted their conversational powers, and yawned drearily in each other's faces. Maude found herself wishing for the end of her honeymoon before the first week had drawn to its close; and Francis, always timidly watchful of his wife's beautiful face, felt a chill anguish at his heart as he perceived her weariness of spirit.

Thus it was that, when they returned to London, the husband and wife were little nearer to each other than on their wedding-day. No pleasant familiarity with each other's thoughts and feelings had arisen during that dull residence in a dull watering-place. That subtle process of assimilation by which—except in some dismal examples—husband and wife grow like each other in mind and feeling, had not yet begun. They were strangers still; in spite of Maude's esteem for her husband's character, in spite of Francis Tredethlyn's blind idolatry of his wife's perfections; and Harcourt Lowther, who was one of the guests at their first dinner-party, was not slow to recognize the state of the case.

"You'll get on admirably together by-and-by, dear boy," he said to Francis, as they smoked their cigars together in a luxurious little study behind the big library, some days after the great dinner. "You'll get on superbly with your lovely wife, if you only play your cards cleverly. There must be no Darby and Joan business, you know—no sentimentalism. Lionel Hillary's daughter is just the woman to be disgusted by that sort of thing. It was all very well, of course, to do the romantic during the honeymoon; but that's all over now; your wife will go her way, and you'll go yours. Her friends will absorb a great deal of her time and attention; your friends will absorb you. You'll have your club, your horses, your men's parties, and perhaps the House,—for you ought decidedly to get into Parliament,—and it will be utterly impossible for you to spend all your mornings hanging about your wife's rooms,

or nursing her Skye terriers, as you seem to have done hitherto."

"But I like so much to be with her," Francis remonstrated, pitifully. "It's very friendly of you to give me these hints, and I dare say you're right, to some degree. I know Maude used to seem very tired at Combe Western, and we both got into the habit of looking at our watches in a dispiriting kind of way every quarter of an hour; but since we've come to London she has quite recovered her spirits, and we are so happy together;—you should have heard her laugh the other morning, when I taught one of the Skyes to shoulder arms with a lead-pencil."

Mr. Tredethlyn laughed aloud himself at the recollection of this feat. Harcourt Lowther shrugged his shoulders, and a frown, or the passing shadow of a frown, darkened his handsome face.

There are some natures in which there is a certain element of childishness, and between such natures no desperate antagonism is ever likely to arise.

"We were rather dull at Combe Western," said Mr. Tredethlyn, presently; "but since we've been in London we've got on capitally. I've been everywhere with Maude—shopping even; and I've written out the lists for her parties, and been on a round of calls; and, in short, I've been the happiest fellow in all creation."

"No doubt, my dear boy; that sort of thing's delightful for a fortnight; but look out for the day when the twin demons of satiety and disgust will arise to wither all these Arcadian delights."

Francis pondered gravely. He had been happy since his return to London, for he had seen Maude bright and lively, pleased with the novelty of her position, happy in her father's affectionate welcome, serene in the consciousness of pure intentions, and grateful for the devotion, of which some new evidence met her at every turn. Poor Francis had been entirely happy; but it needed only a whisper from an elegant Mephistopheles in modern costume to render this simple Cornishman doubtful even of his own happiness. It might be only a sham and delusion, after all; and Maude's sunniest smile might be the smile of a victim resigned to the sacrifice.

"If you think that Maude is likely to grow tired—" Francis began, in a very melancholy tone; but Mr. Lowther interrupted him.

"If I think! dear boy. How can I do otherwise than think what is obvious to the dullest apprehension? Take life as other people take it, my dear, simple-minded Tredethlyn, and you'll

find it go smoothly enough with you. Try to live on a plan of your own, and—the rest is chaos.

*'Il n'est pas de bonheur hors des routes communes :  
Qui vit à travers champs ne trouve qu'infortunes.'*

You had better stick to the vulgar highway, Frank, and not attempt to set up an exceptional *ménage*. No woman will long tolerate a man tied to her apron string. She may be flattered by his devotion in the beginning, but she ends by despising his folly."

So it was that Francis Tredehlyn began life under the advice of his friend Harcourt Lowther. After that conversation in the study the young husband no longer intruded himself upon his wife's leisure, or attempted to identify himself with her pursuits. He found plenty to occupy his own time; for Harcourt Lowther always had some new scheme for his friend's employment or amusement. A race, that no man living in the world could exist without seeing; a horse to be sold at Tattersall's; a celebrated collection of pictures at Christie and Manson's; a bachelor's dinner at a club; a review at Wimbledon;—somehow or other there was always something to be seen, or something to be done, of a nature in which Mrs. Tredehlyn could neither have any part nor feel any interest; and when Francis and his friend dined alone with her, as they did very often, it happened somehow that the conversation was always of a horsy and masculine character, painfully wearisome to the ordinary female mind. If Mr. Lowther had been intent on widening the natural gulf which circumstances had set between these two people, he could scarcely have gone to work more skilfully than he did: though it is of course to be presumed that he was only an unconscious instrument, an involuntary agent of mischief and ruin.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE ROAD TO RUIN.

MAUDE TREDEHLYN took her new life very pleasantly. Her father was happy. There had been a reaction in the City; things were going very well for the Australian merchant; and Francis Tredehlyn was receiving handsome interest for his thirty thousand pounds.

He brought these tidings to his wife's boudoir one morning early in the new year.

"I knew you'd be glad to hear it, Maude," he said; "and now you see that it *was* a very fine thing for me to get into

your father's business. So you need not have been uneasy about the matter, my darling."

Mrs. Tredeithlyn lifted herself upon tiptoe, and pursed up the rosiest lips in Christendom. A kiss, transient as the passing flutter of a butterfly's wing, alighted somewhere amid the thickets of the Cornishman's beard.

"You dear, good old Francis! That is the pleasantest news I ever heard, except—"

"Except what, darling?"

"The news that papa brought me home a year ago, when a generous friend stepped in between him and ruin."

Francis Tredeithlyn blushed like a schoolgirl.

"Oh, Frank, if I should ever forget that day!" said Maude, in a low voice, that had something of sadness in its tone.

Was she thinking that there had been occasions since her marriage when she *had* almost forgotten how much she owed to the devotion of her lover,—occasions on which some little social failure—some small omission or commission—some petty sin against the laws of the Belgravians and Tyburnians, had been large enough to blot out all memory of her husband's goodness? How can you remember that a man has a noble heart, when, for want of the ordinary tact by which the well-bred navigators steer their barks amid the troubled waters of society, he blurts out some unlucky allusion which paralyzes the conversational powers of an entire dinner-table, and brings blight and ruin down upon an assemblage which has fairly promised to be a success? Or how can you be expected to appreciate the generous spirit of a being whose ungainly elbow has just tilted half-a-dozen *petites timbales de gibier* into the ruby-velvet lap of your most important guest?

There were times when Maude was forgetful of everything except her husband's genial good-nature and unfailing devotion. There were other times when her heart sank within her as she saw his candid face beaming at her from the remote end of a long dinner-table, and heard his sonorous laugh pealing loud and long above the hushed accents of Belgravia.

He was her slave. If she loved him—and surely it was impossible that she could accept so much idolatry, and render no small tribute of affection in return—her love for him was pretty much of the same quality as that which she bestowed on her favourite Skye terrier.

He was such a dear, devoted creature—so sensible, so obedient; and if he did not quite stand up in a corner to beg, with a bit of bread upon his nose, it was only because he was not required to do so. He was the best of creatures—a big, amiable Newfoundland, ready to lie down in the dirt to be trodden upon by his mistress's pretty slipper, or to fly at the throat of the foe who

dared to assail her. He was a faithful slave and defender, and it was very pleasant to know that he was always at hand—to be patted on the head now and then when he was specially good—to be a little neglected when his mistress was absorbed by the agreeable distractions of society—to be blushed for, and even disowned now and then, when his big awkward paws went ruthlessly trampling upon some of the choicest flowers in the conventional flower-garden.

He was her slave—her own. He loved her with an idolatrous devotion which she could rarely think of without smiling at his exaggerated estimate of her charms and graces. He was hers—so entirely that no possibility of losing him ever entered into her mind. He was hers, and we are apt to be just a little indifferent about the possessions we hold most securely. It had become a matter of course that her husband should scatter all the treasures of his affection at her feet, and hold himself richly repaid by any waif or stray of tenderness she might choose to bestow upon him. She had no uneasiness about him,—none of those sharp twinges of jealousy—those chilling pangs of doubt—those foolish and morbid fears, which are apt to disturb the peace of even the happiest wife. She knew that he had loved her from the very hour of their first meeting, against his will, in despite of his better reason. She knew that he had been content to stand afar and worship her in utter hopelessness; and having now rewarded his fidelity, she fancied that she had no more to do, except to receive his idolatry, and smile upon him now and then when it pleased her to be gracious.

There was neither pride nor presumption in her nature; but she had lived all her life in one narrow circle, and she could not help being unconsciously patronizing in her treatment of the man who had taken her Majesty's shilling, and blacked Harcourt Lowther's boots.

Francis Tredethlyn might perhaps have been entirely satisfied by brightly patronizing smiles, and gentle pattings on the head, if he had not been blessed with a friend and adviser, always at his elbow, always ready to step in with an intellectual lantern held gracefully aloft, and a mocking finger pointed, when the simple Cornishman's perception failed to show him the uncomfortable side of the subject.

"What a darling she is!" exclaimed Mr. Tredethlyn, as he left the house with Harcourt Lowther, after Maude had parted from him on the staircase all in a flutter of silk and lace, and with a feathery bush of golden hair framed in the last Parisian absurdity in the way of bonnets.

"Mrs. Tredethlyn is just the sort of wife for a man of the world," Harcourt answered, with a slight shrug of his well-shaped shoulders. "But I can't help fancying sometimes that

you're too good a fellow to be thrown away upon the loveliest creature who ever isolated herself from the rest of the human race in the remote centre of a continent of *moiré antique*. Of course I can't for a moment deny that you are the most fortunate of created beings—but—there is always a ‘but,’ you know, even if one has a beautiful wife and thirty thousand a year — suppose it is the habit of my mind to quarrel with perfection. I think if I were a fresh-hearted, simple-minded fellow like you, Tredethlyn, I should yearn for something nearer and dearer to me than a fashionable wife.”

The finger of Mephistopheles, always pointing, generally contrived to touch a sore place. Francis Tredethlyn, even when he had been happiest in the sunlight of Maude's smiles, had felt a vague sense of that one bitter truth. She was no nearer to him than of old. The impassable gulf still yawned between them, not to be bridged over by pretty little courtesies or patronizing smiles.

But in spite of all inward misgivings, Mr. Tredethlyn turned upon his friend, and hotly denied the truth of that gentleman's observations.

Harcourt Lowther was quite resigned to a little fiery contradiction of this kind. The arrow went home to the mark it had been shot at, and rankled there. Such discussions were very frequent between the two men; and however firmly Francis might argue with his friend in the daytime, he was apt to lie awake in the dead of the night, like false cousin Amy in the poem, when the rain was pattering on the roofs of the palatial district, and wonder, with a dull, aching pain in his heart, whether Harcourt Lowther was right after all; and Maude—sunny-haired, beautiful, frivolous Maude—would never be any nearer and dearer to him than she was now.

In the meantime, Mr. Lowther, who sowed the seeds of the disease, was always ready with the remedy; and the remedy was—dissipation.

Harcourt Lowther, in whose few years of legal study had been crammed the vicious experiences of a lifetime, was eager to perform the promise he had made to Francis Tredethlyn some two years before, when the young man first received the tidings of his uncle Oliver's bequest.

“I told you I'd show you life, dear boy,” he said; “and I mean to keep my word. While Mrs. Tredethlyn amuses herself with the usual social treadmill business—perpetually moving on, and never getting any farther—you and I will see a world in which life is worth living.”

Thus it was that Francis Tredethlyn was lured away from a home in which he was taught to believe himself unappreciated, and introduced for the first time within the unholy precincts of the kingdom of Bohemia.

He entered the mysterious regions at first very reluctantly. He had the ignorant rustic's notion of Vice, and fancied that she would show herself in naked hideousness; but he found her with her natural face hidden under a plaster mask modelled from the fair countenance of Virtue. It was something of a caricature, perhaps; for all imitations are so apt to become exaggerations. He found that Bohemia was a kind of Belgravia in electro-plate. There were the same dresses and properties, only a little tarnished and faded; the same effects, always considerably overdone; the same jargon, but louder and coarser. Life in Bohemia seemed like a Transpontine version of a West-end drama, with cheaper scenery and actors, and a more uproarious audience.

This was the kingdom with whose inner mysteries Harcourt Lowther affected a fashionable familiarity. He presented his wealthy friend to the potentates of the kingdom, and carried him hither and thither to worship at numerous temples, whose distinguishing features were the flare of gas-lamps, and the popping of champagne corks, branded with the obscurest names in the catalogue of wine-growers, and paid for at the highest rate known in the London market.

Perhaps in all his wanderings in the darksome wilderness which his Mentor called London life, Francis Tredethlyn's worst sin was the perpetual "standing" of spurious sparkling wines, and the waste of a good deal of money lost at unlimited loo, or blind hookey, as the case might be. He had high animal spirits and thirty thousand a year, which common report exaggerated into sixty thousand, and which the more imaginative denizens of Bohemia multiplied into fabulous and incalculable riches; so that he met with a very cordial welcome from the magnates of the land. But the descent of Avernus, however easy it may be, is a gradual slope, and not a precipitous mountain-side, down which a man can be flung headlong by one push from a friendly hand. Francis Tredethlyn yawned in the faces of the brightest stars in the Bohemian hemisphere. His frank nature revolted against the shallow falsehoods around and about him. The glare of the gas seemed to have no brilliancy: the bloom upon the women's faces was only so much vermillion and crimson-lake bought at the perfumer's shop, and ghastly to look at in a side-light. The laughter had the false ring of spurious coin; the music was out of tune. In all this little world there was no element of spontaneity; except perhaps in the uproarious gaiety of some boyish country squire making a railroad journey through some fine old property that had been kept sacred and unbroken for half-a-dozen centuries, to be squandered on a handful of pearls to melt in Cleopatra's wine, or expended on the soaps and perfumeries of a modern *Lamia*.

There was neither bloom nor freshness on anything except on the wings of a few pigeons newly lured into the haunts of the vulture tribe. Everything else was false, and withered, and faded. The smiles of the women, the friendship of the men, were as spurious as the rhubarb champagnes and gooseberry Moselles, and were bought and sold like them. Mephistopheles may lead his pupil to the Brocken, but he cannot compel the young man to enjoy himself amongst the wicked revellers; nor can he altogether prevent the neophyte from perceiving such small *inconveniences* as occasional red mice hopping out of the mouths of otherwise charming young damsels.

Harcourt Lowther found it very hard work to keep Francis Tredeithlyn amused, night after night, in remote and unapproachable regions, whose very names were only to be spoken in hushed accents over the fourth bottle of Chambertin or Clos Vougeot at a bachelor's dessert. Poor Frank would rather have been dancing attendance upon his wife, and trampling on the silken trains of stern matrons and dowagers at the dullest "Wednesday," or "Tuesday," or "Saturday," in all the stuccoed mansions in which Maude's pretty face and pleasant manners, and his own good old Cornish name and comfortable income, had secured his footing. He was very good-natured, and did not care how much bad wine he was called upon to pay for. He could lose a heavy sum at blind hookey without the faintest contraction of his black eyebrows, or the smallest depression of his lower jaw. But he did not enjoy himself.

He did not enjoy himself—and yet somehow or other he went again and again to the same temples, always under convoy of his friend Harcourt, and generally very firmly resolved that each visit should be the last. But there was always some special reason for another visit—an appointment with some elegant acquaintance of the vulture tribe, who wanted his revenge at blind hookey; or a little dinner to be given at the Star and Garter, in honour of some beautiful Free-Lance, whose chief fascinations were the smoking of tissue-paper cigarettes and a vivacious disregard of Lindley Murray. There was always some engagement of this kind; and as it happened somehow that Francis Tredeithlyn generally found himself pledged to act as paymaster, it would of course have been very unmanly to draw back. If he could have sent his friend Lowther and a blank cheque as a substitute for his own presence, he would gladly have done so; but his friend Lowther took care to make that impossible. So the matter always ended by Mr. Tredethly's finding himself, at some time on the wrong side of midnight seated at the head of a glittering dinner-table; with the ruins of an expensive dessert and the faces of his guests only dimly visible athwart a thick and stifling vapour of cigar smoke;

while the clamour of strident laughter mingled with the occasional chinking and clattering of glass, as some applauding hand thumped its owner's approval of the florid sentiments in an eloquent postprandial oration.

It is impossible to be perpetually paying for sparkling wines without occasionally drinking a little too freely of their bubbling vintage. Francis Tredethlyn, under the influence of unlimited Moet or Cliquot, found the Bohemians a much pleasanter kind of people than when he contemplated them in the cold grey morning light of sobriety. Harcourt Lowther took care that his friend should pretty generally look at things through a rose-tinted medium engendered of the juice of the grape; for he found that it was by this means alone that he could retain his hold upon his pupil.

Go where he might, the Cornishman carried his wife's image in his heart, and he would have left the most brilliant assemblage in Bohemia for a quiet *tête-à-tête* in Maude's boudoir; if his friend Harcourt had not carefully impressed upon him that his entrance into that pretty little chamber was an intrusion only tolerated by Mrs. Tredethlyn's good nature.

There is no need to enter very minutely upon the details of the work which Harcourt Lowther was doing. The art of ruining a well-disposed young man is not a very difficult one; but Mr. Lowther had reduced the art into a science. His great effects were not the sublime hazards of genius, but the calculated results of a carefully studied process. So many nights in a tainted atmosphere; so many Richmond and Greenwich dinners; so many subtle insinuations of Maude's indifference, must produce such and such an effect. Mr. Lowther displayed none of that impolitic and vulgar haste with which a meaner man might ruin his friend. He never hurried his work by so much as a single step taken before its time. But he never wavered, or relented, or turned aside even for one moment from the course which he had mapped out for himself. So, in the course of that London season, it became quite a common thing for a street hansom to bring Mr. Tredethlyn to the gigantic stuccoed mansion which he called his own in the early sunlight of a spring morning. There were even times when the returning wanderer found it no easy matter to open a door with a patent latch-key, which *would* go meandering hopelessly over the panel of the door, scratching all manner of eccentric circles and parabolas on the varnish, instead of finding its way into the key-hole. There was one awful night, on which Maude, coming home from some very late assembly, was stumbled against by a tipsy man who was groping his way up the great stone staircase, and found, to her unutterable horror, that the tipsy man—who apologized profusely for tearing half-

a-dozen yards of Mechlin from the hem of her skirt, declaring that he was "ver' sorr', 'pon m' wor'; b't y' see, m' dea' Maurr, if y' w'll wear dress s' long, mussn' be s'prise get torr t' pieces"—was her husband.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

## ▲ CHILLING RECONCILIATION.

THAT unfortunate meeting on the stairs made a very deep impression upon Maude Tredethlyn. She had never before encountered drunkenness; and it was one of those sins which seemed to her to belong to a region of outer darkness, in which decent people had no place. Her father had always been as sober as an anchorite; her father's guests were gentlemen. She had heard, now and then, in the course of her life at the Cedars, of a drunken gardener dismissed with ignominy from the gardens—a drunken groom degraded from his rank in the stables. But Francis, her husband,—that *he* should be thick of speech and unsteady of foot under the influence of strong drink!—it seemed almost too horrible for belief. She lay awake in the morning sunlight, thinking of Francis Tredethlyn's misdemeanour.

"And just as I fancied that I was beginning to love him!" she thought, regretfully. Would they meet at breakfast? she wondered. And if they did meet, what would Francis say to her? A sickly dread of that meeting took possession of her mind. If he apologized, how was she to answer him? Would it be possible for her to conceal her disgust?

"Let me remember his goodness to my father," she murmured. "Oh, can I ever be so base as to forget that?"

The possible meeting at the breakfast-table was very easily avoided. Mrs. Tredethlyn had a headache, and took her strong green tea and dry toast in the pretty little boudoir, with the pink draperies and Parian statuettes, the satin-wood cabinets and bookcases, the Persian carpets and polar-bear-skin rugs, the marqueterie *jardinières*, and toy Swiss-cottage birdcages, selected by Harcourt Lowther. It was rather an enervating little boudoir, eminently adapted for the perusal of French novels, and the neglect of all the duties of life. Mrs. Tredethlyn breakfasted in this room; so there was no uncomfortable meeting between the husband and wife. Francis left the house before noon, in order to keep an appointment with his friend Mr. Lowther. They were going together to the Doncaster spring meeting, where Bohemianism would be rampant, and were to be away for some days. Poor Francis ran into the library, while his friend waited for him, and scribbled a hasty

note to his wife, full of penitence and self-humiliation. He gave the missive to Mrs. Tredethlyn's maid at the foot of the stairs, while Harcourt was standing in a little room opening out of the hall, arranging the strap of a race-glass across his light overcoat. Mr. Tredethlyn went back to the library in search of a railway rug which he had flung off his arm when he sat down to write the letter; and during his brief absence there was a flutter of silk in the hall, and a little conference between Mr. Lowther and the Abigail.

Half an hour afterwards, when the two men were walking up and down the platform at the King's Cross station, with cigars in their mouths, Mr. Lowther handed his friend the identical letter which Francis had entrusted to his wife's maid.

" You can post that to its address if you like, dear boy; but I think I should light my cigar with it. The seal is unbroken, you see; but I fancy I can make a tolerable guess at the contents of the epistle. Dear old Frank, if you want to preserve the merest semblance of manhood, the poorest remnant of independence, never beg your wife's pardon."

Of course Mr. Tredethlyn was very angry. Harcourt Lowther was prepared to encounter a given amount of resistance. The wave may lash and beat itself against the quiet breast of the rock; and the rock, secure in its supremacy, has only to stand still until that poor worn-out wave crawls meekly to the stony bosom, a conquered and a placid thing. Mr. Lowther had his work to do, and he took his own time about doing it. The apologetic little epistle was *not* sent to Mrs. Tredethlyn; and at an uproarious after-dinner assemblage at the Reindeer, Francis abandoned such frivolous stuff as sparkling Moselles and Burgundies for fierce libations of brandy punch. He made a tremendous book for all manner of events, always under the advice of his friend; indeed, its pages contained many rather heavy engagements with Mr. Lowther himself, who affected extreme simplicity amongst the magnates of the turf, but who was nevertheless eminently respected by those gentlemen, as being of the deep and dangerous class—a dark horse, secretly exercised on lonely commons at weird hours of the early morning, and winning with a rush when he was least expected to do so.

While Francis was seeing life through the medium provided for him by his experienced adviser, Maude enjoyed herself after her own fashion. She had been very happy at Twickenham; but she had never until now been entirely her own mistress, with unlimited credit and unlimited ready money, and all the privileges of a matron. At the Cedars she had been always more or less under her father's direction. She had acted very

much as she pleased upon all occasions; but she had made a point of consulting him about the smallest step in her simple life; a round of calls, a day's shopping, a little musical gathering after a dinner-party, the amount of a subscription to a charity,—even the colour of a dress.

But now the young matron shook off even the gentle fetters which had held the girl, and spread her pinions for a bolder flight. A much wider world had opened itself to the merchant's daughter since her marriage. The story of Mr. Tredethlyn's fortune—always multiplied by the liberal tongue of rumour—was one of the most popular topics amongst the denizens of the new district in which Mr. Tredethlyn's house was situated. None of these West-end people knew that Lionel Hillary's position had ever endured a dreadful crisis of uncertainty and terror. The marriage between Maude and Francis was supposed to be one of those sublime unions in which wealth is united to wealth—the alliance of a Miss Rothschild with a Master Lafitte—a grand commercial combination for the consolidation of capital.

So Maude took her place as one of the most important novelties of the current year. She gave great receptions in her three drawing-rooms, whose gorgeous decorations were just a little too much like the velvet and ormolu magnificence of a public room at a gigantic hotel. She organized dinner-parties, and revised and corrected a *menu*, with the *savoir faire* of a Brillat Savarin in petticoats. Always accustomed to a reckless expenditure, she had no idea of the necessity for some regulation in the expenses of a large household. Left a great deal to herself, and frequently at a loss for occupation, she often spent her husband's money from sheer desire for amusement. After that unlucky encounter on the stairs, she resigned herself entirely to her position as a fashionable wife. Her husband went his way unmolested, and she went hers. She was tolerably happy, for the life was a very pleasant one to live; but oh, what a vain, empty, profitless existence to look back upon!—the success of a dinner, the triumph of an audacious toilette, the only landmarks on a great flat of frivolity. But Mrs. Tredethlyn was not at the age in which people are given to looking back; she was rich, beautiful, accomplished, agreeable, with that dash of recklessness in her gaiety which makes a woman such an acquisition in a drawing-room, and the fumes of the incense which her admirers burned before her were just a little intoxicating. The Twickenham loungers, who had worshipped her mutely and reverently from afar off, found themselves distanced now by bolder adorers, and, conversing amongst themselves upon the staircases and on the outer edges of crowded drawing-rooms in the stuccoed district, shook their heads and pulled their whis-

kers, gravely opining that Mrs. Tredethlyn was "going the pace."

Maude had been Francis Tredethlyn's wife more than six months, and the London season was at its fullest height, when an accidental meeting with Julia Desmond brought about that young lady's restoration to her old position of confidante and companion to the pampered daughter of her dead father's friend. The two women met in the Pantheon; and it was a terrible shock to Maude to see her old companion dawdling listlessly before a stall of toys, dressed in a shabby black silk and a doubtful bonnet, and attended by two ungainly girls in short petticoats and scarlet stockings.

The proud spirit of the Desmonds had been crushed by the iron hand of necessity. In these perpetual duels between pride and poverty, the result seems only a question of time. Poverty must have the best of it, unless, indeed, death steps between the combatants to give poor pride a doubtful victory. Julia Desmond had carried her pride and anger away from the luxurious idleness of the Cedars, to nurse them in a London lodging. The only money she had in the world was a ten-pound note, left out of a sum which the liberal merchant had given her for the payment of a dressmaker's bill. She had the jewels given her by Francis Tredethlyn—the diamonds which she had thrown at his feet in the little study at the Cedars, on the night of the amateur theatricals—but which the sober reflections of the following morning had prompted her to retain amongst her possessions. She had these, and upon these she might have raised a very considerable sum of money. But the angry Julia had no desire to raise money. A life of idleness in a London lodging was the very last existence to suit her energetic nature. She inserted an advertisement in the "Times" upon the very day after her departure from Twickenham, and she went on advertising until she succeeded in getting a situation as governess in a gentleman's family. But ah! then came the bitterest of all her trials. She fancied that her life, wherever she went, would be more or less like her life at the Cedars. There would be a great deal more work, perhaps, there might be less luxury, less gaiety, but it would be the same kind of life: while on any day the lucky chance might arise, and the beauty of the Desmonds might win her some great prize in the matrimonial lottery.

Alas for Julia's inexperienced notions of a governess's existence! She found herself the drudge of an exacting mistress, with every hour of her dreary life mapped out and allotted for her, with less share in the social pleasures of the house she lived in than if she had been the kitchen-maid, and with two small tyrants in crinkled hair and holland pinaflores always on the

watch to detect her shortcomings, and to twist them into excuses for their own. The dreadful monotony of her life would alone have made it odious; but Julia had "a sorrow's crown of sorrow" perpetually pressing on her tortured brow. She had the recollection of happier things—the pleasant idleness at the Cedars, the position of Francis Tredethlyn's affianced wife. And she had given up this position in one moment of ungovernable rage and jealousy. She had suffered one mad impulse of her proud nature to undo the slow work of months. Miss Desmond had ample leisure for the contemplation of her folly during the long winter evenings which she spent in a third-floor sitting-room at Bayswater, hearing unwilling children grind hopelessly at a German grammar by the light of two guttering tallow-candles. She *did* contemplate her folly, while the guttural verbs and declensions fell with a droning noise on her unlistening ears; but the rage which swelled her bosom was against Maude Hillary, and Maude alone.

She saw Maude's carriage in the Park sometimes, while she took her allotted walk with the unwilling children, who might have been pleasant children enough, perhaps, if they had not been weighed down by intellectual exercises compared to which the enforced physical labours of Toulon would have seemed light and agreeable. Julia saw her old companion, and her mind went back to the sunny afternoons on the lawn at Twickenham; and the sight of the pretty face and golden hair, the Skye terriers and neatly appointed equipage, stirred the fire of hatred always burning in her breast, until she could almost have shaken her small fist at the merchant's daughter.

She saw the announcement of Maude's marriage in the "Times," and hated her still more. She saw Maude in the Park, after her marriage, in a more splendid equipage than the landau from the Cedars, and she hated her even more and more. She set her teeth together, and drew back under the shadow of the trees to watch Francis Tredethlyn's wife drive by.

"She has cheated me out of it all," she thought; "it would all have been mine but for her treachery."

Then one bright and sunny afternoon in early May the two women met,—Julia a wan shadow of her former self, worn out with hard work, depressed by the monotony of her life, indifferent as to her dress and appearance; Maude a beaming creature in gauzy mauve muslin, with a Watteau skirt, all a-flutter with ribands, and a voluminous train sweeping the dust behind her.

"Dear Julia—"

"Maude—Mrs. Tredethlyn!"

Miss Desmond turned as pale as death. The encounter had come upon her very suddenly, and she was neither physically

nor mentally able to bear it. She set her teeth and tried to flash the old defiance from her dark eyes. But the light of that once fiery glance died out like the flame of a candle which burns feebly in the glare of the morning sun. Julia was quite worn out by the life she had been leading for the last year and a half. The pride of a Somerset might give way beneath a long course of overwork and indifferent diet.

After that first exclamation of surprise she drew herself to her fullest height, and tried to pass Mrs. Tredethlyn with a bow, and a faint, cold smile of recognition, but Maude stopped her.

"Dearest Julia, if you knew how anxious and unhappy I have been about you, I'm sure you would not want to pass me by. Do let us be friends. The past is forgotten, isn't it? Yes, I'm sure it is. Will you come up-stairs to the picture-gallery? that's always a nice solitary place where one can talk. Are those young ladies with you? What very nice little girls! Miss Desmond and I are going up-stairs, dear, to have a chat. Will you come with us?"

The elder of Julia's pupils, to whom this question was addressed, replied only by a stony glare. She was petrified by the audacity of this smiling creature in mauve who dared to take possession of her governess. The youthful mind, soured by a long course of German declensions, is apt to contemplate everything in a gloomy aspect.

Maude and Julia went past poor Haydon's big cold picture, and made their way to a small room which was quite empty. Julia's face had a stern darkness upon it, which might have frightened any one less hopeful than Maude; but that young lady had been surrounded by an atmosphere of love from her cradle upwards, and was entirely unacquainted with the diagnosis of hatred. She despatched the children to look at the pictures in the larger rooms, and then laying her hand caressingly upon Miss Desmond's arm, she said, very earnestly,—

"Dearest Julia, I hope you have forgiven me?"

Miss Desmond locked her lips, and stood for some moments with her face quite fixed, staring at vacancy. There were hollow rings round the dark eyes now, and the oval cheeks had lost their smooth outline. Perpetual drudgery and friendless solitude had brought Julia very low; but the Desmond pride still struggled for the mastery over its grim assailant—necessity.

"I don't know that I have anything to forgive," said she, after an ominous pause; "Mr. Tredethlyn was free to transfer his affections as often as he chose. I was very glad to read of your marriage, for it was at least satisfactory to find that he had not changed his mind a second time. I do not blame any

one but myself, Mrs. Tredethlyn. I should have been wiser than to entrust my happiness to a man who——”

Miss Desmond stopped abruptly. She made a long pause, during which she contemplated Maude, almost as if she had been looking for some tender spot in which to plant her dagger.

“I must not forget that he is your husband, and I do not wish to say anything humiliating to you; but I *cannot* forget that he is not a gentleman. No gentleman would have treated any woman as Mr. Tredethlyn treated me.”

If Julia’s conscience had had a voice, it might perhaps have chimed in with an awkward question here: “And would any lady have spread a net to catch a rich husband, Julia, trading on the generosity of his simple nature, and angling for the fortune of a man whose heart was obviously given to another?”

Mrs. Tredethlyn’s bright face crimsoned, and her lower lip fell a little. It is not to be supposed that she could be very fond of her husband; but she felt any allusion to his shortcomings almost as keenly as if he had been the incarnation of her girlish dreams. Whatever he was, he was hers, and she was responsible for him.

“If generosity of heart could make a gentleman, Julia,” she said, almost entreatingly, “I think Francis would be the first of gentlemen.”

Miss Desmond did not condescend to reply to this observation.

“Oh, Julia,” Mrs. Tredethlyn said, after another little pause, “how can you be so unkind and unforgiving? Have you forgotten how happy we used to be together long ago at the Cedars? If—if I thought you were pleasantly circumstanced now, I would not worry you with any proffers of friendship; but somehow I cannot think that you are happy. Dear Julia, forgive me for the past, and trust me once more.”

The stony look in Miss Desmond’s face did not melt away under the influence of Maude’s tenderness; but presently, with an almost awful suddenness, she sank upon the nearest chair, dropped her face upon her clasped hands, and burst into a passion of tears—convulsive sobs that shook her with their hysterical force. The strong will of the Desmonds asserted itself to the very last, for this passionate outburst was almost noiseless. The slender frame writhed and trembled, the chest heaved, the small hands were clenched convulsively, but there was no vulgar outcry. Miss Desmond recovered herself almost as suddenly as she had given way to her emotion, and drew up her head proudly, though her face was blotted with tears.

“Heaven help me!” she exclaimed; “what a poor weak wretch I am!”

“You will let me be your friend again, won’t you, Julia?

You'll come and live with me once more? You need see very little of Mr. Tredethlyn, if you dislike him. He and I are quite fashionable people, I assure you, and he is very seldom at home. I shall be so glad to have you with me. I go a great deal into society, and I know you like society, Julia. Come, dear, let us be friends again, just as we used to be in the dear old times."

Maude gave a little sigh—she was apt now and then to think sentimentally of that remote period of her existence, some four or five years back, when she had believed that the happiest fate Heaven could award her would be a union with Harcourt Lowther. Even now, though she had schooled herself to think of him coldly, though she tried very hard not to think of him at all, the memory of the old time would come back; the picture of the home that might have been—the little cottage in St. John's Wood—the long quiet evenings, made delightful by genial companionship—the pleasant hours devoted to art—the dear old concertante duets by Mozart and Beethoven—the "two souls with but a single thought, two hearts that beat as one,"—the images of these things were apt to arise suddenly before her, in the midst of her frivolous pleasure in her fine dresses, and gorgeous house, and admiring friends.

"Dear Julia," she said, winding one arm caressingly about the Irish girl, "you will come, won't you?"

"Yes," Miss Desmond answered, "I will come if you want me. But I must come upon a new footing. This time I must work for my wages. I have been a hired slave ever since I left your father's house. I will be your servant, Mrs. Tredethlyn, if you choose to hire me."

"Julia, you will be my friend, just as you used to be."

"No," cried Miss Desmond, with a resolute gesture of her hand, "no; if you want a companion to keep your keys and attend to your lapdogs, to finish fancy-work that you have begun and grown tired of, to read French novels to you when you want to be read to sleep, to write your letters of invitation, to take the bass in your duets, or carry an occasional message to your milliner,—if you want a person of this kind, I am quite willing to be that person."

"Julia!"

"I will come to you on those terms, or not at all."

"You shall come to me on any terms you please, so long as you come."

"Very well, then, I will come. My present employer gives me sixty guineas a year, and makes me work harder than a pack-horse. You can give me the same money, if you think my services worth so much. I will make arrangements for leaving my present situation. A housemaid left the other day, and I believe she gave her mistress a month's notice—I suppose the

same rule will hold good with me: I will come to you at the end of that time, unless you change your mind in the meanwhile."

"I shall not change my mind; I only wish you could come to me to-day. Take my card, dear, and give me yours."

"I have no cards," answered Miss Desmond. "I have neither name nor place in the world, and have no need of visiting-cards."

She wrote her address upon the back of an envelope, and gave it to Mrs. Tredethlyn. To the last her manner was cold and ungracious: but Maude parted from her happy in the idea that she had rescued her old companion from a life of drudgery.

"Why should I not be her hired slave? I shall still have the right to hate her," thought Miss Desmond, as she went back to Bayswater with her gloomy charges.

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

### SEEING A GHOST.

UNDER the perpetual influence of his friend and master, Harcourt Lowther, Mr. Tredethlyn's days and nights were so fully occupied that he had very little leisure for serious thought. Day by day the patient master taught his deadly lesson; day by day the luckless pupil took his teacher's precepts more deeply to heart. The simple, credulous nature was as malleable as clay under the practised hand of the modeller, and took any shape Mr. Lowther chose to give it.

Francis was fully impressed with the idea that his money had purchased a lovely wife whose heart could never be given to him. All that fair fabric of hopes and dreams which had been his when he married Maude Hillary had been slowly but surely undermined, and there was nothing left of its brightness but the memory that it once had been. He thought of those foolish hopes now with anger and bitterness. Could he at any time have been so mad, so blind, so besotted, as to believe that this beautiful creature, perpetually floating in an atmosphere of frivolity and adulation, would ever fold her wings to nestle tenderly in his rude breast? Othello, recalled to the sense of his declining years and grimy visage by the friendly bluntness of Iago, could scarcely have thought more bitterly of his lovely Venetian bride than Francis thought of Maude after six months' daily association with his old master. But if the poison was quick to do its deadly work, the antidote was always at hand. With thirty thousand a year and a fine constitution, what need has a young man for reflection? It is all very well for Mr. Young the poet, having failed to obtain wealth or preferment,

to retire from a world which has treated him ill, and meditate upon the transitory nature of earthly blessings that he has been unable to obtain; but with youth and thirty thousand per annum, surely no man need be bored by such a darksome guest as dull care. Harcourt Lowther did his best to shield his friend from the gloomy intruder by contriving that Francis Tredehlyn's existence should be one perpetual fever of hurry and excitement. But though you may carry a man from racecourse to race-course, by shrieking expresses tearing through the darkness of the night; though you may steep him to the lips in theatres and dancing-halls; though you may drag him from one scene of mad unrest to another, till his tired eyeballs have lost their power to see anything but one wearisome confusion of gas light and colour,—you *cannot* prevent him from thinking. The involuntary process goes on in spite of him. He will think in a hansom cab tearing over the stones of the Haymarket, in an express train rushing towards Newmarket at sixty miles an hour, on the box-seat of a guardsman's drag, on the rattling fire-engine of an aristocratic amateur Braidwood, on the downs at Epsom—yes, even at the final rush, when every eye is strained to concentrate its power of sight upon one speck of colour, the man's mind, for ever the veriest slave to follow that will-o'-the-wisp called association, will wander away in spite of him,—to mourn above a baby's grave, to sit amidst the perfume of honeysuckle and roses in a still summer twilight trifling with the rings on a woman's hand.

There were times when thought would come to Francis Tredehlyn, in spite of all his friend's watchful care. He would sit at the head of a dinner-table at the Crown and Sceptre, staring vacantly at the frisky wine-bubbles in his shallow glass, and thinking how happy he might have been if Maude had only loved him. Ah, this poor substitute of noise instead of mirth,—this pitiful tinsel of dissipation in place of the pure gold of happiness,—how miserable a mockery it was even at the best!

Mr. Lowther generally broke in upon such gloomy reveries as these by calling to the waiter to exchange his friend's shallow glass for a tumbler. But there are pangs of regret not to be lulled to slumber by all the sparkling wines that were ever grown in the fair champagne country, and Harcourt Lowther sometimes found his work very difficult.

But amidst such perpetual hurry and excitement it was only natural that some things should be almost entirely forgotten by Francis Tredehlyn, and amongst these forgotten things were the sorrows of his missing cousin. The Gray's-Inn lawyers had *carte blanche*, and could have employed all the detective machinery in London in a search for Susan Tredehlyn, *alias* Susan Lesley, had they so chosen; but your intensely respect-

able family solicitor is the slowest of slow coaches, and Messrs. Kursdale and Scardon contented themselves with the insertion of an occasional advertisement in the second column of the "Times" supplement, informing Susan Lesley that she might hear of something to her advantage on applying at their office; and further offering a liberal reward for any information respecting the above-mentioned lady.

The advertisement did not entirely escape notice. A good many Susan Lesleys presented themselves:—one a fat old woman of seventy, who kept a tobacconist's shop in the neighbourhood of Seven Dials; another a bony and pugnacious-looking person, with fiery red hair, and a fine South-of-Ireland brogue, who threatened dire vengeance on the quiet lawyer when he refused to recognize her pretensions to hear of something to her advantage. All the Susan Lesleys were ready to swear anything in order to establish their claims to that unknown advantage—which might be anything from a five-pound note to a million of money, or a dormant peerage,—but they all broke down lamentably under Mr. Kursdale's cross-questioning, and he did not even trouble Francis Tredethlyn to confront the false syrens.

So, amid Newmarket meetings and Greenwich dinners, chicken-hazard, billiards, and unlimited loo, poor Susan's rustic image melted quite away; and Francis forgot the solemn promise he had made, and the sacred duty he had set himself to do when his Uncle Oliver's heritage first fell into his hands. And Francis Tredethlyn's forgetfulness might have lasted very long, if an accident had not awakened him to a most vivid recollection of the past.

It was the May-time saturnalia of the turf, the Epsom week, and Mr. Tredethlyn's drag had been to and fro upon the dusty roads carrying a heavy load of Bohemianism under convoy of the indefatigable Harcourt Lowther. Francis had been rather unlucky, and a good deal of money had changed hands after the Derby, the larger part of it finding its way into the pockets of Mr. Tredethlyn's obliging friend. The Oaks day was to have redeemed his fortunes, but the day was over, and Francis drove home amongst the noisy ruck of landaus and waggonettes, ponderous double dog-carts, and heavily-laden sociables, tax-carts and costermongers' barrows, with the outer leaves of an attenuated cheque-book peeping from his breast-pocket, and the dim consciousness that he had distributed hastily-scribbled cheques to the amount of some thousands, floating confusedly in his brain. He drove to town through the spring twilight, with Dutch dolls in his hat, and a heavy pain in his heart. The *papier maché* noses of his companions were scarcely more false and hollow than their gaiety.

Of course it would be impossible to conclude such a day without a dinner. The sort of people amongst whom Francis Tredethlyn lived are perpetually dining and giving dinners; only the dinner-givers are as one to twenty of the diners; so, at some time between nine and ten o'clock, Maude's husband found himself in his usual place at the head of a glittering table, in an odorous atmosphere of asparagus soup and fried mullet, and with a racking headache, that was intensified by every jingle of glasses and rattle of knives and forks.

He had lost heavily, and had drunk deeply under the warm May sunshine on the Downs. To lose cheerfully is given to many men, but how very few have the power to lose quietly! Francis had taken his disappointment in a rather uproarious spirit; slapping his companions on the shoulder, and making new engagements right and left; backing the same horses by whose shortcomings he had just lost his money; and huskily protesting the soundness of his own judgment in despite of the misfortunes of to-day.

He went on talking now at the head of the dinner-table, though the sound of his own voice by no means improved the splitting pain in his head. He went on talking amidst a clamour of many voices, through which one sober and silent toady, sitting next Mr. Tredethlyn, made a vain effort to understand his discourse. He poured forth misty vaticinations on coming events, gave general invitations for a great dinner at Virginia Water on the Ascot cup day, and galloped noisily along the road to ruin in which Harcourt Lowther had set him going. That splitting headache of his was getting worse every minute, when some one proposed an adjournment to an adjacent theatre.

There had been counsel taken with a waiter. A West-end waiter is no mean dramatic critic, though he never sees a play; the opinions of playgoers percolating perpetually through his ears must leave some residuum in the shape of knowledge. The waiter opined that the best entertainment in London was to be had at Drury Lane, where a melodramatic spectacle of some celebrity was being played that evening for the last time but one.

Inspired by the waiter, Mr. Tredethlyn's party made their way to the theatre, bearing Mr. Tredethlyn along with them, indifferent where he went, and carrying his headache with him everywhere.

It was past ten o'clock, and the last scene of the great spectacle was on. The house was full, and the audience were chiefly of that restless and vociferous order who drop into a theatre at half-price on great race-nights. Mr. Tredethlyn and his party could only find standing-room at the back of the dress-circle, and from this position Francis beheld the grand final tableau.

The piece was an adaptation of some great Parisian success—some story of the Reign of Terror,—and in this last scene the stage was crowded by a clamorous populace. Upwards of three hundred men, women, and children were engaged in the scene. Blouses and uniforms, the picturesque head-dresses of the provincial peasantry, the scarlet cap of liberty, the cocked hats of the gendarmerie,—all blended in one grand mass of movement and colour, while the rapid action of the piece drew to its triumphant close.

Mr. Tredethlyn did not trouble himself to wonder what the piece had been about. He saw somebody killed—a villain it was to be supposed, since the crowd set up a well-organized yell of rejoicing; then there was a reconciliation, an embrace, a young lady in short-waisted white muslin clasped to the breast of a young man in a long-tailed blue coat and low top-boots, adorned with many-coloured bunches of riband. Then the band broke into the stately measure of the “*Marseillaise Hymn*,” the crowd clamoured a shrill chorus, and the curtain fell.

It was while the curtain was descending very slowly to that triumphant music that Francis Tredethlyn saw something which startled him like the sight of a ghost.

It was a face—a woman’s face in a high Normandy cap, looking out of the many faces in the crowd, a thin, worn, melancholy countenance, very sad to look upon, among all those other faces fronting the audience with a stereotyped smile.

“My God!” cried Mr. Tredethlyn, clasping his two hands upon his hot forehead, and pushing back the rumpled hair, “who is it? What’s the matter with me? I feel as if I’d seen a ghost!”

There was a little piece after the melodrama, a slender little production, popularly known as a “screaming” farce. It was not the most strikingly original dramatic invention, and its chief point consisted in one gentleman in tartan trousers being perpetually mistaken for another gentleman in tartan trousers, while both gentlemen were alternately sitting upon bonnet-boxes and dropping trays of crockery.

There was certainly not very much in the farce, but the audience laughed uproariously, and Francis Tredethlyn’s party joined in the laughter. He found himself laughing, too, as loudly as the rest of them; but amidst all that confusion and clamour, the wan, sad face, with two inartistic patches of rouge upon its hollow cheeks, kept surging up ever and anon out of the chaos of his brain, and haunting him like the face of a ghost.

Who was it? What was it? Was it some accidental likeness? Was it a face that he had seen and known in the past? Alas for the steady, clear-headed soldier, who had been so

prompt to obey military orders, so strict in the performance of duty! Francis Tredethlyn's muddled senses refused to help him to-night. The author of "What will he do with it?" tells us that light wines are the most treacherous of liquors: "they inflame the brain like fire, while melting on the palate like ice." Mr. Tredethlyn had been drinking a mixture of divers champagnes and Moselles all day long, and he tried in vain to fix the vague image which floated amidst the confusion of his brain.

He went home in the early grey of the May morning; but not to sleep. He lay tossing from side to side, tormented by that preternatural wakefulness which is apt to succeed a long period of riot and excitement. The course at Epsom, the gipsy fortune-tellers, the betting-men in white hats and green veils, the Dutch dolls and pink calico pincushions, the dust and clamour of the homeward drive, the jingling of broken glass, the popping of corks, the revolutionary crowd in the drama, the tartan trousers and broken bandboxes in the farce,—all mixed themselves in his brain, falling to pieces, and putting themselves together again like the images in a kaleidoscope.

Mr. Lowther, coming to see his friend at the correct visiting hour, found Francis still in bed, in a little room behind the library, which he had fitted up for himself at Harcourt's instigation, as a bedroom and dressing-room, a kind of refuge to which he might betake himself when he was unfit to encounter the calm gaze of Maude's clear blue eyes fixed upon him in sorrowful wonder. Her manner to him had never quite recovered its old kindness since that unlucky encounter on the stairs. She was still kind to him; but he could see that it was by an effort only that she retained anything of her old friendliness. He could see this, and the knowledge of it galled him to the quick. Harcourt Lowther's work was more than half done by this time. He had no longer any difficulty in beguiling Francis abroad, for the Cornishman no longer cared to remain at home.

Mr. Tredethlyn had not very long fallen into a feverish slumber after long hours of wakeful weariness, when his friend called upon him. Harcourt seated himself by the side of the narrow brass bedstead, and stared contemplatively at the sleeper, while he spoke to the valet who had admitted him to the darkened chamber.

"You can let your master sleep till four o'clock, Jervois," he said. "At four give him some soda and brandy. He has an appointment with me at half-past five. Take care that he doesn't oversleep himself. I'll write him a line by way of reminder."

He drew a little writing-table towards him, and wrote a few lines on a sheet of note-paper:

**"DEAR TREDETHLYN,—Remember your engagement at my**

quarters; 5.30 sharp. You had better bring the mail phaeton, and can give me a lift to the S. and G.

"Yours faithfully,  
"H. L."

He slipped his note into an envelope, and dipped his pen into the ink; but before writing the address, he stopped suddenly, and tore the note into fragments.

"*She* might see it!" he muttered, thoughtfully, "and that might show her the nature of my cards. The only wise man is the one who can do his work without that most dangerous of all machinery—pen and paper. Poor Francis! he looks a little worn."

Mr. Lowther looked down upon the sleeper with the most benign expression. He had no dislike whatever to the simple Cornishman; he had only—his own plans.

"These fellows who come suddenly into a large fortune are sure to kill themselves before they have done spending it," he murmured, complacently. "Jervois," he said, as he went out, "you won't forget your master's engagement. He'd better drive up to my place in the mail phaeton."

Mr. Lowther's "place" was the same lodging which he had taken for himself when he first returned to England. He was an adventurer; but he was not a vulgar adventurer, and in all his dealings with Francis Tredethlyn he had not sponged upon that gentleman's purse for so much as a five-pound note. He had his plans; but they were not the plans of a man who lives from hand to mouth. He won a good deal of his friend's money; but he never cheated Francis out of a sixpence. His sole advantage was that which must always accompany skill and experience as opposed to ignorance and inexperience. In the meanwhile, Harcourt Lowther lived as best he might on his winnings and a small allowance made him by his mother.

The Lowthers were great people in their way, and Harcourt had admission to some of the best houses in London. He was very well received in that circle in which Maude Tredethlyn had taken her place, and contrived somehow or other to be present for an hour or so at almost all of the parties in which she appeared; though to break away from the haunts of Bohemianism to drop into politer life, and then return to Bohemia in the same evening, was almost as difficult as a harlequin's jump in a pantomime. Harcourt Lowther did this, however, and did it very often; and Maude Tredethlyn, enjoying all the privileges of a matron, found herself sometimes standing amongst the statues and exotics on a crowded staircase in Tyburnia, talking with Harcourt Lowther almost as familiarly as they had talked in the old summer evenings by the quiet river.

Sometimes, looking back upon such a meeting, Maude felt inclined to be angry with Mr. Lowther for having taken something of the old tone; but could she blame him for the lowered accents of his voice, the subdued light in his eyes, the unconscious tenderness into which he was betrayed in those public meetings, when she remembered how nobly he kept aloof from her in her home? Never yet had he presumed upon his intimacy with the husband in order to intrude himself on the presence of the wife. What harm or danger, then, if, in crowded assemblages, he surmounted all manner of small difficulties in order to make his way to her side? What could it matter if he lingered just a little longer than others, contriving all sorts of excuses for delay? It is rather a pleasant thing for a frivolous young married woman, serene in the consciousness of her own integrity, to know that a man's heart is breaking for her in a gentlemanly way. A word too much, a tone, a look, and Maude would have taken alarm, and fled from her old admirer as from the venomous fangs of some deadly reptile; but Harcourt Lowther knew better than to speak that word. He had his own plans, and he was carrying them out in his own way: neither by word nor look had he ever yet offended Maude Tredethlyn; but now, when he tried to cut a path for himself through the crowd about her, he found less difficulty in the progress. People began to make way for him, and it was considered a settled thing that he should be found somewhere near her. He had not offended her; he had only—compromised her.

Francis awoke before the hour at which his servant had been told to call him. The valet's place was almost a sinecure, for the Cornishman still retained, of his old nature, the simple independent habits of a man who can wait upon himself. He got up at four o'clock, and had nearly completed his toilet, when the servant brought the soda and brandy prescribed by Harcourt Lowther.

"And if you please, sir, you were to be so good as to remember an appointment with Mr. Lowther at half-past five, and was to please to drive the mail phaeton," said the valet, while his master drank the revivifying beverage.

"Very good," muttered Mr. Tredethlyn, with something like a groan; "you may go and order the phaeton for five o'clock. Is Mrs. Tredethlyn at home?"

"No, sir."

The man departed, and Francis finished dressing. He had ten minutes to spare after putting on his outer coat, and he sat down to look at the newspaper which lay ready cut on his writing-table. He took up the "Times," but only stared

vacantly at the advertisement sheet. His head still ached, in spite of a shower-bath and a vigorous application of hard hair-brushes; but his intellect was a good deal clearer than it had been before he dressed.

Suddenly, out of the advertisement sheet, vivid as the figure of Banquo at Macbeth's uncomfortable supper-party, there arose before him a face—a wan, faded face—in a white muslin-cap.

"Great Heaven!" he cried; "I didn't know her!"

The ghost that he had seen upon the previous night was the ghost of the woman he had so long been looking for—his cousin Susan.

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## CHAPTER XXVIII.

**"OH, MY AMY! MINE NO MORE!"**

FRANCIS TREDETHLYN drove his friend down to Richmond at a rattling pace, but he scarcely spoke half-a-dozen words throughout the journey; and Harcourt Lowther, keeping the watchful eye of the master upon his pupil, saw that something was amiss.

Now although the Cornishman's guide and Mentor had his plans, very definite plans, as clearly drawn out as the great Duke's arrangements for Waterloo,—which wondrous victory was *not* quite the lucky accident our neighbours imagine it to have been; yet he was far too wise a diplomatist to ignore the sublime opportunities which chance sometimes throws in the way of a schemer, shattering the complicated machinery so dexterously and patiently put together, and opening a new and easy way to success over the ruins of the old road.

Mr. Lowther was quite prepared to make good use of any accident which seemed likely to help him. He was like a chess-player who takes his place before the board with a perfect plan of action mapped out in his mind, and who may see his entire scheme overthrown, his most brilliant arrangements stultified by the first move of his adversary, but who will win the game nevertheless, after his enemy's fashion, if not after his own, being no enthusiastic advocate of pet theories, but only a man of the world, resolutely bent on success. Upon this particular afternoon Harcourt saw that something had gone amiss with his friend, and he was bent on discovering what the something was. With this view he had resort to that imaginary instrument which his companions of Bohemia called the "pump-handle;" but on letting down a moral plummet into the depths of Mr. Tredethlyn's mind, he found himself in much deeper water than usual, and quite unable to reach the bottom.

"If he has secrets from me, he'll throw all my machinery out of gear," mused Mr. Lowther; "and yet I don't quite know that—a secret might be worked into something *with her*. What a wonderful creature that Iago was, by the bye! especially when one considers that he took all that trouble for no better motive than jealous twinges about a wife whom he treated like a dog, and an envious grudge of Cassio's advancement. Aha, my divine Williams, that's the only flaw in your *magnum opus*; your motive power isn't equal to your ponderous machinery! Now if Othello had been the owner of thirty thousand a year and a beautiful wife whom Iago loved, there might have been some reason for the exhibition of a little Italian diplomacy. But revenge! Bah! The luxury of a maniac. The pet wickedness of a woman. Your novelist cannot write a story, your playwright cannot devise a drama, but he must have recourse to revenge to keep the action going. Yet, in the history of men how small and pitiful a part the heroic passion plays! A Cromwell condemns a Charles Stuart to the scaffold. For revenge? No; simply because Charles is in his way. A Robespierre drowns his country in the blood of her sons; and yet I doubt if he bore a hearty grudge against one of his victims—a little political jealousy, perhaps, at the worst. A Richelieu extinguishes the haughty *noblesse* of France—out of revenge? No; but the *noblesse* interfere with the schemes of my Lord Cardinal. A Countess of Essex connives at the poisoning of her husband: revenge? not a bit of it, but because she wants to marry some one else; and poor Sir Thomas Overbury must die, not that any one hates the man, but the creature is so tiresome. And Arabella Stuart pines in prison; and the heads of the regicides rot on Temple Bar; and Charles, the merry monarch, the pet of the painters and romancers, the man whose sins have been dealt with so lightly that we are apt to mistake them for virtues—can be as hard as a Nero when it suits him that the patriots Russell and Sidney shall perish in their prime; and James II. sends young Monmouth to the block. Why? Is revenge the impulse that stirs these men's hearts? Not at all. Not man's passionate hatred of his neighbour, but man's devoted love of himself is the motive power that moves the headsman's arms, and bids the swooping axe descend upon fair young necks from which the lovelocks have been newly shorn. Revenge? Pshaw! Has it a feather's weight in the balance of history? In all the story of our land, what has revenge to answer for? A semi-mythical Rosamond poisoned in her bower—an Essex condemned in passionate haste, and lamented in dreary leisure by the Queen who loved him—a Konigsmark's handsome face trampled upon by a German tigress."

With such random reflections as these Mr. Lowther beguiled

the silence of the drive to Richmond. During dinner and throughout the evening he watched his friend closely; but all the fascinations of Bohemia were powerless to arouse Francis Tredehlyn from the thoughtful mood. Indeed, the Bohemians had a charming faculty for enjoying themselves amongst themselves without any reference to the host and paymaster, who was generally looked at rather in the light of a bore and an intruder—the death's head at the banquet. Some of Mr. Tredehlyn's new friends had christened him the Necessary Evil; and to-night, while he sat moodily brooding over the story of his cousin, pretty lips made faces at the company over his shoulder; and one lovely Bohemian, more playful than the rest, amused herself and her acquaintances by filling the pockets of his dress-coat with the empty shells of the lobsters, and the corks of the champagne.

For the rest, what did it matter in what dreary regions his mind wandered, so long as he was there to write a cheque for the bill? Only one pair of eyes looked at him with any show of interest; and those eyes watched him as the serpent watches the bird; with as deadly a purpose, with as quiet a gaze. But, watch him as closely as he would to-night, there was something in Francis Tredehlyn's mind which Harcourt Lowther could not read quite as easily as a page in an open book, and as it was his habit to read most things relating to the Cornishman.

"What does it matter?" thought Mr. Lowther, abandoning himself to reflection again during the homeward drive; "let him keep his secret from me if he likes, and I'll use it for my own benefit when he plays against me. He is my dummy, and he plays *my* game. When he leads a suit of his own choosing, I am ready on his right hand with a cluster of small trumps. Play as he will, he can scarcely throw me out. What does it matter *how* the game is won, so long as one scores the odd trick?"

The day after this Richmond dinner was Sunday; but even that circumstance did not prevent Francis Tredehlyn from taking preliminary steps towards finding the missing girl whom he fancied quite within his reach now; since it seemed certain that the face he had seen on the stage of Drury Lane was the face of his uncle Oliver's daughter, and no other. It had been his habit until very lately to accompany Maude every Sunday morning to a certain fashionable place of worship not very far from Sloane Street, where miserable sinners lamented their iniquities and their wretchedness amid the subdued rustling of silk at a guinea a yard, and in an atmosphere that was odorous with Jockey Club and Ess Bouquet. But Star-and-Garter dinners, and evenings "firished" in mysterious localities at the

West-end, are by no means conducive to early rising; and now the Sabbath bells that Mr. Tredethlyn had been wont to hear ringing blithely in the morning air while he breakfasted with his wife, were apt to mingle with his feverish morning dreams, and to transform themselves into the shrill peal of an alarm-bell summoning the fireman's succour for perishing wretches in some blazing habitation, or the bell on board a boat leaving a pier—a boat which the dreamer was—oh, so eagerly—striving to reach, but never, never could; for just as his foot was going to step upon the deck, the plank on which he trod would give way and tilt him into the waking world; with a raging headache, perhaps, and a dull ceaseless pain in his breast, which he scarcely cared to acknowledge by its ugly name of Remorse.

So now Mr. Tredethlyn was apt to spend the earlier part of his Sunday morning in fitful slumbers, and the later portion of his day in the society of his devoted friends. Unhappily Mephistopheles has such a knack of making himself useful, that after once enjoying his society, Faust is apt to find life very dreary without that fatal companionship. Drifted away from the simple life that was natural to him, Francis was only a helpless creature, with all the dismal blank of existence to be filled up somehow or other.

But upon this particular Sunday he had a purpose of his own, and the honest energy with which he set about the achievement of that purpose transformed him into a new being.

Harcourt Lowther might have felt a little twinge of alarm had he seen his pupil, as he walked away from the stuccoed district, with the old light in his eyes, the old lightness in his firm tread. Francis forgot that he had an empty life to drag out, and an idolized wife who did *not* love him. He forgot everything, except that he had to redeem his half-forgotten vow to fulfil a long-neglected duty.

"My uncle Oliver's money brought *her* peace of mind, and prosperity for the father she loves so dearly," thought Mr. Tredethlyn. "Let me remember that, when I think of his disinherited daughter."

Crumpled in one of the pockets of his overcoat, Francis had found the programme of the performances at Drury Lane, and in the long list of names crowded together at the bottom of the programme, he discovered half hidden amongst Percies and Vavasours, Vane Tempests and Leveson Gowers, and such appellations as the *corps de ballet* modestly chooses for its own—the vulgar name of Turner. He concluded, therefore, that his cousin had called herself Turner at the Drury Lane Theatre, as well as at Coltonslough, and he did not anticipate much difficulty in finding her. The search after any information upon theatrical matters might have seemed rather a hopeless thing on a Sunday,

but Francis Tredethlyn's energy was not to be damped by small difficulties.

"I have wasted too many hours already," he thought; "where my poor lost girl is concerned, every moment of delay seems a new wrong."

He took a hansom and drove straight to the theatre; but Drury Lane on a Sunday seems an utterly hopeless and impracticable place. The stage-door was closed. The box-office might have been the tomb of the Pharaohs for any appearance of life within its portals. Happily Francis was not to be disheartened. He walked up and down the street until the clocks struck one, and a dense crowd began to pour out of a chapel in Crown Court, and disgorge itself into Little Russell Street. Then, when the doors of the public-houses were opened, he entered a tavern nearly opposite the stage-door, and made his inquiries.

The barmaid at the tavern was able to tell him where the stage-doorkeeper lived, but she was not able to give him any information as to the habitations of the ladies of the *ballet*.

"Most of them live out at Camberwell, or up Islington way; though how they manage it, poor things, walking backwards and forwards through all sorts of weather, is more than I can tell. They send over here when there's a long rehearsal for their half pint of porter and their sandwich, and that's about all the dinner they get on such days, I dare say."

Thus, discursively, the barmaid. Francis left her, and made his way to the adjacent court in which the doorkeeper was to be found in his private capacity. That gentleman was in the midst of a very greasy dinner and in the bosom of his family when Mr. Tredethlyn intruded on him, and was at first inclined to resent the interruption.

"I don't carry two hundred and forty-nine addresses in my blessed head," he remarked, in an injured tone; "which our company at the beginning of this season was over two hundred and forty-nine; and I don't care to be hunted upon Sundays when I'm eating of my dinner, for a pack of *ballet*-girls. I don't get paid for *that* when I take my salary. If any young swell wants to find out one of our ladies' address, to leave 'em a bokay, or to take a ticket for their benefit or such-like, I should think they could find it out of a week-day, and not come chivying of a man over his Sunday wittles."

But a judiciously-administered half-sovereign had a very soothing effect upon the mind and manners of the doorkeeper. There are so few things in a small way which cannot be done with half-a-sovereign. The man laid down his knife and fork, and applied himself to serious reflection, while his wife and

family suspended their operations to stare admiringly at the fashionably-dressed intruder.

"Let me see," said the doorkeeper, scraping his stubbly chin as he mused, "there's such a many of 'em, that I may sit here trying to remember where this here Miss Turner lives till dooms-day, and not be no wiser. I'll tell you what I'll do with you, sir; I've got the addresses of every member of the company in my book over the way. I'll slip over and get Miss Turner' direction, while you wait here if you like."

"Over the way" was Drury Lane Theatre. The doorkeeper took some ponderous keys from a nail over the mantel-piece, and put on his hat. Francis Tredethlyn went with him.

"Turner," said the man; "Turner? A pale-faced young woinan, ain't she? looks as if she'd gone through no end of trouble. She's only an extra, took on for this here great piece that's just done with."

"An extra?" inquired Francis.

"Yes; a sort of supernaume'ry; not a reg'lar ballet-girl,—can't dance, or anything of that sort, only fit to go on in crowds, and so on. I remember her, a very quiet, civil-spoken young person."

The address was soon found; it was at a house in Brydges Street. Francis left the doorkeeper with his heart beating tumultuously; his face pale with emotion that was half joy, half pain—joy at finding her at last, when hope had almost died out into forgetfulness—pain at finding her thus. Ah, yes! it was very painful to remember the innocent rosy face peeping out of a dimity bonnet, and to know that sorrow had set its undefaceable hand upon that rustic beauty, and that the face **he** remembered had no more a place upon this earth.

"Miss Turner and Miss Willoughby live together over an eating-house in Brydges Street," the doorkeeper had told Francis, with the further information that he was to pull the top bell twice. Mr. Tredethlyn found the eating-house, which was ostensibly closed; but the door of the shop was ajar, and the atmosphere about and around it seemed greasy with the steam of suet-pudding and boiled meat. The bell which Francis rang was answered by a careworn-looking woman of doubtful age, who had an air of faded gentility, a flimsy smartness of apparel, which was more plainly demonstrative of poverty than the shabbiest garments that ever hung together loosely upon the figure of a slattern.

"Miss Turner lives here, I believe?" Francis said eagerly; "I wish to see her, if you please."

"Miss Turner *did* live here," the woman answered, "but she has left."

"Left? Why I saw her at the theatre only the night before last, and the doorkeeper has just directed me here."

"Mis. Turner's engagement expired last night, sir, and she left London this morning."

"This morning, only this morning! But of course you can tell me where she has gone? I am her first-cousin, her only surviving relative. If I had known that there was the least chance of her leaving London, I should have tried to find her last night. Will you be good enough to direct me to her?"

The woman shook her head.

"I don't know where Miss Turner has gone," she said.

Francis Tredethlyn's face whitened to the very lips.

"My God!" he exclaimed, "is there a fatality in this business? am I never to find her?"

Then addressing himself to the woman with sudden earnestness, he said,—

"For pity's sake, if you can help me in my difficulty, do so with all your might. You do not know how much depends on my finding her. I scarcely think I should say too much, if I were to tell you that it is a matter of life and death; for I saw my cousin's face the night before last, and it looked to me like a face that is fading away from this earth. You have been told, perhaps, to give no one her address; but she did not think her cousin Francis would come to ask for it. Pray trust me and believe in me; I am the only friend that poor girl has in all this world."

"I have told you the truth, sir," answered the woman, quietly; "I do not know where Miss Turner has gone. Anything I can tell you about her, I shall be happy to tell," she added, as if answering the look of blank despair in Francis Tredethlyn's face; "but it is very little. Will you step upstairs to my room? It is only a humble place, but it will be quieter there than here."

This could scarcely fail to be true; for during the very brief interview which had just taken place, Francis had been brushed against and flouted some half-dozen times by young persons with jugs and door-keys, going to and from a neighbouring public-house. It was the popular dinner-hour in Drury Lane, and four separate floors, with their minor divisions of backs and fronts, were more or less engaged in the business of dining.

Francis followed his cousin's late associate, Miss Willoughby, up three steps of rather dingy stairs, upon which little colonies of children had established themselves here and there with their toys. One young gentleman of tender years was trying to fly a kite in the well of the staircase, with a persevering disregard of atmospheric difficulties and the heads of the passers below; while a young lady, belonging to an adjacent tribe of settlers,

took her doll for an airing in a lobster-shell, drawn by a string which wound itself about Mr. Tredethlyn's legs, and had to be unwound like a bandage. Occasional skirmishers from distant settlements came sliding down the banisters—which, compared to the stairs, were as the modern railroad to the ancient highway—assailing peaceable families with the war-whoop of defiance: and the cries of “Shan’t,”—“Do it again, then, there!”—“Wouldn’t you just like to, now?”—“Won’t I tell my mother, that’s all?”—“Tell-tale-tit, yah!”—resounded in a delightful confusion of voices from the first floor to the attics.

Miss Willoughby conducted Francis to a back room upon the third floor—a dark gloomy little room, hung with chocolate-and-drab paper, but enlivened by a little gallery of theatrical photographs, and some engraved portraits cut out of Tallis’s “Shakespeare,” neatly arranged over the mantel-piece.

It was not very difficult to perceive that the anomalous piece of furniture, which was too vividly brown for mahogany, too elaborately grained for nature, and which was not quite a chest of drawers, nor altogether a wardrobe, was neither more nor less than a member of the mysterious family of press-bedsteads. It was not difficult to perceive that industrious poverty and simple independence reigned in that three-pair back, whose pitiful goods and chattels, and worthless scraps of ornament, were arranged with as exquisite a neatness as might pervade the chambers of a bachelor in the Albany, or a gandin of the Faubourg St. Honoré.

“I shall miss your coasin very much,” said Miss Willoughby; “we got on so nicely together.”

“She lived with you? Here?” asked Francis.

“Yes; we shared this apartment. It made the rent come lighter for both of us, and apartments are so dear in London; and of course it was the same advantage in coals—not that we wanted many for our little bit of cooking, but one can’t even boil a kettle without a fire; and saveloys and sandwiches are apt to pall upon one after a long continuance; so, having Miss Turner to live with me made it altogether come much pleasanter; besides which, we were always the best of friends.”

Mr. Tredethlyn was slow to answer. He was looking round the room, and out at the leaden ball floating on the surface of a dingy leaden cistern visible athwart some scarecrow geraniums, which seemed as if they had been put upon a short allowance of mould. Everything in the place, from the scrimped morsel of worn carpet, which only made an oasis of Kidderminster in a dreary desert of boards, to the handful of red coals that burned brightly between massive embankments of brick, bore mute evidence to the poverty which struggles and endures. An open cupboard stared Francis in the face, and he

saw, oh, such a pitiful morsel of sickly-complexioned ham lying cheek by jowl with the fag-end of a stale half-quartern loaf. He looked at these things, and remembered the house in which he lived, the reckless extravagance that pervaded all his life.

"Does a curse cling to the gold of a miser?" he thought; "and is my uncle Oliver's child never to derive any advantage from the wealth her father scraped and pinched together, at the cost of everything that makes life endurable?"

He roused himself from his brief reverie to appeal once more to the elderly ballet-girl, who had seated herself by the little Pembroke table, on which lay a newspaper evidently borrowed from the establishment below, and transformed into a kind of parchment by the action of grease.

"Give me what information you can about my cousin," he said, imploringly; "and if you will accept any little present from me in acknowledgment of your kindness, I will send you a cheque to-morrow morning, and you shall purchase what you please as a memorial of your friendship for my poor little Susy."

A faint flush kindled in Miss Willoughby's pale cheeks. A cheque! Oh, bright representative of an El Dorado, only to be thought of in some happy dream. Clara Willoughby—otherwise Mary Anne Jones—had not seen such a thing as a cheque since the happy time in which she had been columbine at the tumble-down little theatre in a garrison town, and the colonel himself had taken five pounds' worth of tickets for her benefit.

"You are very kind," she said; "but I don't want any payment for the little help I can give you. Miss Turner is a very quiet young person; and, though we were so friendly together, she never told me anything of her history; and when she went away this morning, having only been taken on as an extra, and her engagement expiring last night, she said, 'You've been very good to me, Clara, and I shall always remember you kindly; and if things go well with me, I'll write and tell you where I am. You mustn't be offended because I don't tell you where I am going. I don't quite know myself. I have not made up my mind yet; there's a place I want to go to, and friends I want to see; but I don't think I shall ever bring my mind to go there, or to see them.'"

"I think I understand her," said Francis. "I think the place she means is her old home. If she goes there, I shall hear of her immediately; but if—if she should not be wise enough to return to the friends who would be so glad to shelter her—. Did she ever speak of her home, or of her cousin Francis Tredethlyn?"

"Never! She seemed to have some settled grief upon her mind; and having known trouble myself, I know how hard it

is to be worried by strangers' questions and strangers' pity, even when it's meant ever so kindly; so I never asked her to tell me so much as one word about her former life."

"But how did she come to be at the theatre with you? I should think of all ways of earning a living, that must be the very last that would occur to my cousin Susan."

"That's very true," answered Miss Willoughby; "but it doesn't take a woman long to come to the last way by which she can earn her bread—the ways are not so many. I can tell you how your cousin came to be at Drury Lane, for I was the means of getting her engaged; and it all came about, as one may say, quite promiscuously. I suppose you know that Susan Turner is a married woman?"

"Yes, I do know of her unhappy marriage."

"She called herself Miss Turner in the bills, because, *you see*, in the theatrical profession a single female is always considered more attractive; though why it should be so,—unless with regard to boys in jackets, in the Christmas holidays, who, being apt to fall in love with the columbine, might find it damping to their spirits to know she was the mother of a family,—I really can't imagine. However, Susan was Miss Turner in the bills, and I am Miss Willoughby for the same reason, although I've been thirteen years a widow come next boxing-night. Perhaps you may remember the sprite who was killed by a fall off a flying bridge in 'Harlequin Buttercup, or the Maiden all Forlorn; the Fairy Queen of the Daisies, and the Cow with the Crumpled Horn,' twelve years ago last Christmas? Not being professional yourself, you mayn't happen to remember the circumstance; but Signor Wilsonio was my husband. He was *not* an Italian, and his name in private life was Wilson. We had been married two years, and he left me with a little boy just six months old."

Francis listened very respectfully to this fragment of *family history*, but he chafed under its infliction nevertheless.

"If you will tell me how you came to——" he began.

"I am just coming to that," answered Miss Willoughby, with dignity. "My poor husband, not having anything to leave me except a complimentary benefit, which the manager of the theatre allowed me on account of my bereavement, I was obliged, of course, to continue in the profession; and oh, sir! nobody that hasn't gone through it can tell the pain of having to change your widow's weeds for white muslin and spangles, and put away your baby from your breast to go and slap cheesemongers' shops into furnished lodgings with a harlequin's wand. As soon as I got over the dreadful kind of numbness that came upon me in the first of my troubles, I looked out for some one who would take care of the child; for I need not tell

you that you can't leave an infant-in-arms in unfurnished lodgings *without* attendance, when you get black looks from your landlady if you so much as ask for your fire to be poked once in an evening in a friendly way, and much less to look after a child, which is apt to be trying to the best of tempers. Well, sir, inquiring of one and another, I heard of a very respectable elderly person who had seen better days—and it does seem odd, but people connected with bringing up children by hand always have seen better days. The elderly person lived down Chelsea way, close to the water, which was considered healthy, and next door but one to a cowkeeper—also considered healthy, especially if predisposed to consumption."

"If you would only—" murmured Francis, despondently.

"Which I am just coming to," answered the *ci-devant* columbine, again with dignity. "The long and short of it is, I took my baby to the respectable elderly person at Chelsea, and there he's been ever since, at seven shillings a week, which is a hard struggle sometimes now, though light enough when I was engaged as columbine; but dancing has made such progress, and unless you can take flying leaps from one side of the stage to the other, a manager won't look at you."

"But with regard to—"

"Which I am about to explain," continued Miss Willoughby, with unshaken calmness. "It was at the respectable elderly person's that I first met Miss Turner; for my darling baby having learnt to call his nurse Nungey, and taking so to her, and not taking to anybody else, and she so attached to him, that she froze my very blood by talking of Battersea Bridge in quite a meaning way, when I spoke of taking him away. Owing to this and one circumstance and another, Harry has stopped at Chelsea till he's quite a big boy. So, of course, I very often go to see him—not that he takes to me so much as he ought to do, being so wrapped up in his Nungey. And one day, about three years ago, I went there quite promiscuous, and found Harry walking up and down before the door with a baby in his arms; and the nurse told me that she'd put an advertisement in the paper, and the very day it was inserted a lady came to her—a sweet-looking young creature, she said—and left this baby, which might be going on for twelve months old. Well, the long and the short of it is, that this was your cousin Susan's baby; and going there off and on, I saw a good deal of your cousin. But see her as much as you would, she was so quiet and so reserved, that you never got anything like intimate with her. At first she was dressed like a lady, and she had a pretty little gold watch and chain, and many things that had cost money; but, little by little, all these disappeared, and she seemed to get very poor. One day, when I was there, it came out somehow that she was

doing plain needlework for one of the great cheap outfitters' houses in the City, and what a hard life it was, and, worse than hard—uncertain; so then, knowing there were 'extras' wanted for the new piece, I proposed to her that with my help she should try and get engaged. It would be much lighter work than the plain sewing, and better pay. Well, at first she was very much against it, but after a deal of persuasion she gave way, and I got her the engagement. That was full five months ago; for the piece had a long run. She had been lodging in one room at Chelsea until then, for the sake of being near her boy, and she left that lodging to come and share mine."

"And do you think she will go back to the old lodging?"

"I doubt it. She seemed so uncertain, that I really don't think she'd made up her mind where to go."

"But she is likely to have gone straight to her child!" cried Francis. "Will you give me the address of the old woman at Chelsea? Oh, I thank you so much for giving me this clue. I *must* find my poor girl now!"

The sprite's widow opened a little portfolio and wrote an address on a scrap of paper, while Francis stood by eager to take it from her.

"Do you know that there has been an advertisement appealing to my cousin, in the columns of the "Times" newspaper, a hundred times within the last two years?"

"Dear! dear!" murmured the ballet-dancer; "and she going through so much, with rich friends looking for her all the time. But, you see, poor people can't afford to take in a newspaper; and there might be only a threepenny paper standing between a man and a million of money, and he none the wiser."

She handed Francis the address, which was a very long one. And then she gave him divers verbal directions, the gist of which was, that he was to find a certain public-house called "The Man in the Moon," and was then to inquire of anybody for a certain street, and was to go a little way farther and inquire again, thus accomplishing his journey by easy stages and frequent inquiries.

But Francis was much too full of hope to be dashed by any small difficulties. He grasped the dancer's hand in his heartiest way, and left Brydges Street in impetuous haste. The hansom cabman, who met him at the corner of Russell Street, and drove him thence to "The Man in the Moon," was a lucky individual, and went home rejoicing to the bosom of his family. But after dismissing the cabman, Francis had to thread his way through intricacies which would have been maddening in a hansom cab, and were only to be overcome by repeated inquiries and frequent reference to Miss Willoughby's written direction.

At last, however, while the bells were still ringing for afternoon service, Francis Tredethlyn found the place, which was a damp little street without any thoroughfare, called Pollard's Row. Pollard's Row, with the summer sunlight on it, and given up entirely to the occupation of one mongrel dog, which was lying with his head upon his forepaws, snapping at imaginary flies, was a dreary place to contemplate; Francis Tredethlyn troubled himself very little about the aspect of the neighbourhood. He walked rapidly past the little row of houses until he came to No. 17, which was occupied by the respectable elderly person, otherwise Mrs. Clinnock.

The elderly person made some faint show of a commercial character in the shape of three very green pickle-bottles containing confectionery, all more or less melted out of its normal mould by long exposure to the sun, and a few gingerbread figures of weird and ghastly outline, supposed to represent the human form. A tattered chintz curtain hung upon a limp string, and made a background to these wares. Looking across this curtain Francis Tredethlyn saw a woman sitting in the ruddy glow of the fire, with a child in her lap, and knew by the beating of his heart that he had found his cousin Susan.

The door of No. 17 stood ajar. Francis pushed it open and went into the passage. Three steps brought him to the door of the little room, which was a compound of shop and parlour, with a slight flavour of bedroom. A woman—a girlish creature still, but pale and worn-looking—was sitting in a low nursing-chair, with a child of four years old in her arms. Alas for the handiwork of Sorrow, the destroyer! The soft brown hair, the tender hazel eyes, alone remained of the rustic beauty which Francis Tredethlyn remembered smiling at him upon the moorlands of his native county.

Ah, how much of his youth came suddenly back upon the Cornishman in that moment of recognition! His mother's face watching him as he left the dear old homestead in the early summer morning to go to the dame-school; happy haymakings on his father's farm in the days when haymaking and harvest time were two Arcadian festivals, and not nervous crises in the life of a hardworking farmer, who may or may not be able to pay his rent. His childhood came back to him with all its unconscious happiness, and he fell on his knees by his cousin's chair in a tumult of emotion.

"Susy, my darling, my pet! at last, at last I have found you!"

The boy slid from his mother's arms, frightened by this tumultuous stranger. Susan rose pale and trembling, and shrank away with her hands spread before her face, as if even now she would have hidden herself from her cousin.

"Oh, Francis," she cried, "don't come near me—don't look at me! Oh, Heaven have pity on me! I have so prayed that none who ever knew me in my childhood should see me now."

"But, my darling, why should you hide yourself from those who love you so fondly?"

She made him no direct answer, but covered her face with her hands and sobbed aloud—

"Oh, my shame—my shame! Who will believe me when my father would not?"

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### ENTANGLEMENTS IN THE WEB.

HARCOURT LOWTHER, calling at the stuccoed mansion in time for Mrs. Tredeithlyn's afternoon tea, found a dark and dashing young lady comfortably established in a luxurious amber damask nest against a background of amber curtain, whose glowing tints were extremely becoming to the young lady's clear complexion. The two ladies were quite alone, though Maude declared gaily that she had had crowds of people that afternoon.

"You generally come so late, Mr. Lowther," she said. "Those were the Dudley Boltons whom you met going out—nice people, fresh from the wolds of Yorkshire, quite new to town, people who come once in ten years or so, when there's an International Exhibition, or something of that kind. Isn't it strange that people *can* be so civilized living in the depths of the country—read the last novel—see the last great picture—because you see, nowadays, great pictures jog about the country like popular prime ministers, and if Mahomet can't go to the mountain in Trafalgar Square, the mountain goes to meet Mahomet in his provincial town. But I want to introduce you to Miss Desmond, the daughter of the late Colonel Desmond, papa's oldest friend. Julia dear, Mr. Lowther has heard me talk of you perpetually, and you have heard a good deal of him,"—Mrs. Tredeithlyn blushed a little as she said this,—"so I expect you to be intensely intimate immediately."

This introduction took place towards the close of June, nearly a month after the Oaks day; and during the time that had elapsed since that event, Harcourt Lowther, in his character of Mephistopheles, had found Faust what is popularly called a very troublesome customer. Francis Tredeithlyn had a secret, and so far it had been a secret which Mr. Lowther could neither penetrate nor turn to his own use.

Yes, this simple-minded Cornishman, whose confiding candour had revealed every feeling, and every shade of feeling, to his baneful companion, had his secret now, and seemed to know very well how to keep it.

There were days on which he had business which took him a little way out of town; and Harcourt Lowther, pumping never so wisely, could pump no further information out of the secret depths of his friend's mind. He had even proposed to accompany Francis on these mysterious excursions, but his friendly offers had been met by a point-blank refusal. He had ventured a little playful *bardinage*; he had gone so far as to make an occasional insinuation; but Francis Tredethlyn had repelled his hints with the fiery indignation of a man whose tenderest and noblest feelings are involved in the subject of his friend's *persiflage*.

"I know you get plenty of pleasant little witticisms of that kind out of those flimsy-covered books Mr. Jeffs supplies you with; but hadn't you better keep them for Mrs. de Rothsay's next evening party? They tell so much better amongst people who understand the French phrases you're so fond of using. Some of your best things might as well be Greek, so far as I am concerned," Mr. Tredethlyn said, coolly.

Mephistopheles shrugged his shoulders in mild depreciation of his pupil's impertinence. Faust was positively beginning to acquire the tone of good society. He was learning to be insolent.

Harcourt Lowther left no stone unturned in his endeavours to discover the Cornishman's secret, but unluckily there were not many stones to turn: and when Mr. Lowther had pumped Francis, and pumped Francis's valet, who could give no clue whatever to his master's conduct, there remained nothing more to be done; unless, indeed, Mr. Lowther had cared to resort to the private-inquiry system, and employ a shabby-genteel person at three or four guineas a week to track the footsteps of Mr. Tredethlyn. But this was a plan to which Harcourt Lowther could only have resorted in the most desperate extremity. If possible, he wanted to do dirty work *without* soiling his fingers. The private-inquiry system would have been a dangerous kind of machinery to put into motion—dangerous even if successful—utterly fatal in the case of failure; and it was just possible that the shabby-genteel person might do his spiriting awkwardly, and make his watchfulness sufficiently intrusive to arouse suspicion, and bring impetuous Francis Tredethlyn down upon him in an avalanche of manly rage.

"Pshaw!" thought Mr. Lowther, after a meditative and leisurely review of his position. "It's only a matter of so much time. '*Point de zèle*,' said Talleyrand; but he only meant, don't be in a hurry. Your zealous diplomatist may be a very valuable person, provided he knows how to keep the secret of his earnestness; but your impatient diplomatist is a certain failure. Yet there are people who *will* gather their

fruit before it is ripe. When your true diplomatist comes to an awkward knot in the airy network of his scheme, the best thing he can do is to sit down quietly before the web until some accidental hand unravels the entanglement. Chance is the unfailing friend of the schemer; but the goddess is very capricious in her visiting routine, and there are stupid creatures who won't wait for a morning call. Luckily, I am not one of them. I can afford to be patient. Maude is an angel; the Stuccoville dinners are excellent, and the Stuccoville wines are my own selection; and for the rest I do pretty well. Ecarté is a most agreeable game; especially when one plays with a man who is half his time so absent-minded as to forget to mark the king. Yes, dear Francis, I can afford to wait for the lucky accident which is to put me in possession of the clue to those little trips of yours, in hansom cabs, which you prefer to pick up for yourself; thereby depriving your valet of any help to be derived by an examination of the number of the vehicle, and a subsequent chat with the driver."

Harcourt Lowther came very frequently to Mrs. Tredethlyn's drawing-rooms, now that she was to be found always accompanied by her darling Julia, and entirely unembarrassed by his visits. He did not always come at the orthodox hour, but would make his appearance between eleven and twelve o'clock on a hopelessly rainy morning, with a new book, or a roll of music, or something delightfully hideous in the way of jelly-fish for Maude's aquarium, or the last fashion in ferns or orchids for Maude's conservatories; and the back of Mrs. Tredethlyn's house broke out into ferneries and conservatories wherever the ingenuity of a fashionable builder could find an excuse for carrying out Mrs. Tredethlyn's graceful ideas, and swelling Mr. Tredethlyn's little account.

Mr. Lowther had contrived to make himself the friend of the house, so there was always some very plausible excuse for visits at unorthodox hours, and pleasant dawdling in Maude's pretty morning-room; and Stuccoville, furtively observant behind rose-coloured curtains in opposite houses, took note of Mr. Lowther's morning calls, and kept a sharp account of the period that elapsed between his entrances and exits; and all this time nothing could be more delicately deferential, more tenderly respectful, than Harcourt Lowther's manner to his friend's wife. By not one hazardous phrase, by not so much as a furtive glance, a half-suppressed sigh, had he awakened Maude to a perception of possible danger in this pleasant intimacy with a man who had once been her affianced husband. No poisonous breath from the schemer's false lips had tarnished the purity of this bright young soul; but Stuccoville had taken alarm already, and—in confidential converse in cosy corners of ottomans, under the

shadow of a tall vase of exotics, or a Parian statuette—declared Mrs. Tredethlyn's conduct to be “Positively appalling, my dear; and that absurd west-country dolt of a husband continues as blind as ever; and now she has taken a companion, my love. You remember the companion in ‘Vanity Fair,’ that delightful Becky calls her a sheep-dog; and you recollect Madame de Marneffe's companion in that horrible novel of Balzac's, which my tiresome Georgiana found the other morning at the bottom of a cupboard, in which her brother Charles keeps his cricketing shoes and fishing-tackle, and was discovered by the governess sitting on the ground positively devouring the book, and when questioned said it was ‘Télémaque;’ but as I was about to tell you, my dear, with regard to Mrs. T—— and Mr. H. L——!” and so the little mole-hill gathered size, and gradually grew into a mountain.

Harcourt Lowther and Mrs. Tredethlyn's darling Julia were not slow to arrive at a very friendly understanding. One morning spent in Miss Desmond's society was quite sufficient to show so subtle an observer as Harcourt the real state of that young lady's feelings with regard to her patroness. Indeed, Julia did not take much trouble to conceal her sentiments. Gay and animated one minute, darkly brooding the next, very often captious and contradictory, sharply ironical, or sternly defiant, she was in all things the very reverse of the paid companion who sets her employer's caprices against the amount of her salary, and gratefully accepts any pleasures or advantages that fall in her way. Maude's natural forbearance was exaggerated by a remorseful consciousness that all the luxuries and gaieties of her life were so many blessings which she had in a manner stolen from Julia, and her tenderness towards Miss Desmond was unbounded. But there were times when the Irish girl rebelled even against this tenderness.

“Do you think my poverty is an open wound, that you approach it so shrinkingly?” she exclaimed impatiently, one day when Maude had broken down in a delicate periphrasis, in which she tried to offer to pay her friend's milliner's bill without wounding her friend's pride. “Why don't you say at once, ‘My husband has thirty thousand a year, and a twenty-pound note more or less is ineffably unimportant to me—while *you* must go bareheaded if your pride revolts against dirty tulle and tumbled flowers?’ Pay me my salary, Mrs. Tredethlyn, when it becomes due, and do not force your favours upon me! for I come of a proud race, who are slow to perceive the difference between an unwelcome favour and an uncalled-for insult. As for the unmade silk dresses which you have tried so delicately to force upon me, under the pretence that the colours are unbecoming to

your complexion, you can parade your wealth and your generosity by presenting them to your maid. I am *voué au noir* henceforward; and when you are tired of seeing my shabby-genteel black moiré and Limerick lace in some obscure corner of your rooms, you have only to give me a hint, and I will spend the evening in my own apartment."

It was not often that Miss Desmond indulged in such a speech as this, or perhaps even remorseful Maude could scarcely have endured her companionship. She sometimes made herself very agreeable during those idle rainy mornings in which Maude and Harcourt practised the old concertante duets for flute and piano, or dawdled amongst the delicate ferns with the crackjaw names in the little fernery that opened out of the boudoir; or devised gorgeously incomprehensible illuminations for an obscure verse in Malachi. Julia could never be charming, for the power to charm is a gift *sui generis*, and does not necessarily go along with versatile accomplishments or intellectual superiority; but she could be an amusing and agreeable companion whenever she pleased to exhibit herself in that character, and she did so please very frequently; for it is so much less trouble to be agreeable than to be disagreeable, that the most persevering sulker is apt to give way under the weary burden of his own bad temper. But let Miss Desmond be ever so vivacious, or ever so delightful, Harcourt Lowther never lost sight of one fact,—and that was the fact of Julia's unpeased and unappeasable hatred of Maude Tredethlyn. Stuccoville, which was omniscient of everything, knew that Mr. Tredethlyn had been engaged to Julia, and had jilted her in order to marry Maude; and from Stuccoville Mr. Lowther obtained the clue to the Irish girl's feelings.

"A little genuine feminine malice might be rather a useful element, if I can set it working unconsciously for my benefit. Your amateur's assistance is generally a dismal failure; but I really think this Miss Desmond might help me. She is so very clever—and so intensely spiteful."

So one morning when Harcourt Lowther happened to find Julia alone in the morning-room, he took the opportunity of being quite confidential upon the subject of Mr. Tredethlyn's dissipation.

"He dined from home yesterday? and the day before? Ah, to be sure, I dined with him the day before," said Mr. Lowther, with a deprecating sigh. He did not attempt to conceal the fact of his own participation in Francis Tredethlyn's pleasures; but he contrived in the most subtle manner to make it understood that he accompanied Francis in the character of a guardian angel, a protecting spirit in modern costume, with an arresting

hand for ever extended to snatch the sinner from the verge of the precipice. Miss Desmond shrugged her shoulders disdainfully.

"I don't think Mrs. Tredethlyn values her husband's society sufficiently to feel his neglect very keenly," she said; "she seems perfectly happy."

Yes, it was quite true; Maude seemed very happy, though her husband spent the best part of his time away from home, and was gloomy and ill at ease in her society. Harcourt Lowther's hints had done their work, and the breach was very wide between husband and wife. Francis believed that his presence was odious to Maude. Maude imagined that home pleasures and simple domestic enjoyments were tame and insipid for Francis. And it had all been so easily done! Harcourt had only to make a few careless speeches about his friend.

"You see, my dear Mrs. Tredethlyn, a man of our dear Frank's temperament requires out-door amusements—hunting, and shooting, and racing, and all their agreeable concomitants in the way of meet breakfasts and uproarious dinners. A man with Frank's animal spirits must have more boisterous pleasures than can be procured in a drawing-room, however charming—or amongst women, however delightful. There are some men who do *not* care for the society of ladies; very excellent fellows in their way, but men in whose minds poetry and music, beautiful scenery, exquisite sentiments, grand ideas, are all classed under one head as 'doosid bores.' You know the style of man who calls everything except his horse and his dog a 'doosid bore.' I don't say that Tredethlyn is *quite* that sort of man, but he is not a domestic animal."

Mr. Lowther—sitting amongst a chaos of feminine litter, snipping out painted birds and flowers with a pair of fairy-like scissors for Maude's *potichomanie*, looked the very incarnation of all that is domestic and devoted to the fair sex. Perhaps he fully estimated the advantage of the contrast between his own character and that of the men he had been describing.

Mrs. Tredethlyn gave a little sigh.

"And Frank *used* to be so very domestic; and so dotingly fond of Floss," she said, looking pensively at a mouse-coloured Skye terrier, whose cold nose reposed in the pink palm of her pretty hand. "However, we contrive to do very well without him, don't we, Flossy Possey? and we shouldn't care if he went to all the races in that dreadful calendar, and never, never came near his own house at all, should we, Flossy Possey?"

Harcourt Lowther, looking up furtively from the covert of his auburn eyelashes, snipped a bird into mincemeat, and tightened his mouth until the thin lips were scarcely visible.

"That nonsense sounds rather like pique," he thought.

"Can she care for the fellow? A handsome boor, who would scarcely know the difference between Beethoven's 'Moonlight' and 'Rule, Britannia!'-can she have the faintest sentiment of affection for such a man as that, when—"

Mr. Lowther's self-esteem finished the sentence,—

"When she knows me, and can contrast my infinite graces and accomplishments with the boor's defects?"

But Mr. Lowther, looking at his position in all its aspects, could not do otherwise than perceive that the provincial rust was gradually wearing off the farmer's son, and that Francis Tredeithlyn was learning to hold his own amongst men who had played cricket in the Eton meads, and paced the grand old cloisters and quadrangles of Oxford and Cambridge. Association is the best schoolmaster; and even in Bohemia, a man who is blessed with a fair amount of intelligence must learn something.

There were times when Harcourt Lowther frowned darkly as he brooded over his cards, and began to think that the game was not such an easy one to win, after all. But he played patiently, notwithstanding; and, true to his faith in the saving help of Chance, he waited for the goddess to look over his shoulder, and point with her inspired finger to the trump which should win him the final trick.

## CHAPTER XXX

### THE TWO ANTIPHOLI.

IT was while the schemer was waiting that an event occurred which had some influence upon the current of his life.

His elder brother, heir to all that Robert Lowther, of Lowther Hall, Hampshire, had to leave, and expectant heir to the more important possessions of a very wealthy maiden aunt, returned unexpectedly from Belgium, where he had been established for some time as a member of the *Corps Diplomatique*, and dropped unannounced into Mr. Lowther's lodging while that gentleman was lounging over his breakfast.

The meeting between the two brothers was not remarkable for its enthusiasm. Roderick Lowther strolled lazily into the room, dropped into an easy-chair, and indulged in a long leisurely stretch and a loud yawn before he addressed his astonished relative.

"Didn't expect to see me yet awhile, did you, old boy? Been travelling all night, and feel as if my bones were not so much bones as rheumatism,—some fellow says something like that in a book, doesn't he? Came over in the *Baron Osy*; very

bad passage, jolting and tumbling about all night, waves mountains high, as people say in books. So you've cut the line, dear boy, and are living on the proceeds of your commission, I suppose? The warrior blood of the Lowthers who fought at Bosworth and Flodden seems to have lost a little of its fiery quality in filtering through three centuries of country gentlemen. There was a Lowther who distinguished himself at bloody Malplaquet, by the bye, and another who was with young General Wolfe on the heights of Quebec. But we've done with all that nowadays. We are peacefully disposed, and sell out on the earliest opportunity; and we steal a march on our beloved brother, and come home on the quiet to cultivate our maiden aunt."

"That's a lie," replied Harcourt, very coolly. "I haven't been near her since I came home."

"What did you come home for then?" asked the other. "You came for something."

The two men looked at each other. They were very much alike. There was the same steely light in the blue eyes, the same tight contraction of the thin lips. The elder looked at the younger with a glance of shrewd inquiry; the younger looked back sulky defiance.

"Come," said the traveller, after a second leisurely stretch and a second prolonged yawn, "what is it, then, the little game? Say, my friend. You didn't sell out of her Majesty's service without a motive, and you didn't come home without a motive. By Jove! you never did anything in your life without a motive. You are a schemer, my dear Harcourt. The schemer is born, and not made, and he must obey his instincts. Dear boy, I know your organization, and in these days of physiological science no man can keep himself quite dark. Iago would have been a failure if Othello had studied his Lavater. Be candid, Harcourt, and tell me what noble vessel, laden with the spoils of a new Peru, flaunts her white sails upon the wind, and invites the attention of the pirate."

"You are so deuced confiding yourself, that you've a right to demand another fellow's confidence," Harcourt responded, moodily. "When I want your help, I'll tell you my secrets. That has been *your* way of managing matters, I believe."

"My Harcourt bears malice!" exclaimed Roderick. "Antipholus of Ephesus reproaches Antipholus of Syracuse. Dear boy, I suppose it's our misfortune to be too much alike. Perhaps, if you won't give me your confidence, you will at least oblige me with a chop. There was an atmosphere of smoky chimneys and warm train-oil on board the *Baron* which incapacitated me for breakfast."

Mr. Lowther the elder possessed himself of the teapot, and

appropriated his brother's breakfast-cup, while Harcourt rang the bell and gave an order for additional rolls and chops.

"I didn't know you were coming to England," Mr. Lowther the younger said, after a pause, in which he had stared moodily at his brother.

"I suppose not," answered the other; "and I can't say that the heartiness of your welcome is very encouraging to the returning prodigal. However, as I have not been in these dominions for the last three years or more, and as my father and I are not the best friends,—there's nothing so economical for a parent as a long-standing quarrel with all his children, by the way,—I shall look to you, my dear Harcourt, for any friendly offices I may require. I have three months' leave of absence, and I have not—*le sou*. I come to England to recuperate, as brother Jonathan has it. I want to get on the blind side of my beloved aunt to the tune of a few hundreds; and I want to marry an heiress."

"Oh," said Harcourt, thoughtfully, "you want to marry an heiress?"

"Yes; can you help me to do it?"

"I think not."

"Humph! perhaps if I could make it worth your while to assist me you'd tell another story. However, you can introduce me to some nice people, I suppose?"

Harcourt nodded moodily.

"And I must look up my own old set. Not that I know many people, for I lived such a hide-and-seek sort of life when I was in England. Can you get me rooms in this house? We can commonize, you know. I left my portmanteaus on board the *Baron*. I suppose there's a boots, or a somebody of the scout species appertaining to this establishment, who can take a cab, and fetch them for me?"

Thus unceremoniously did Antipholus of Syracuse establish himself in the abode of his ungracious brother. Frankenstein, pursued by the monster of his creation, could scarcely have seemed more ill at ease than Harcourt Lowther under the infliction of his brother's society. Was it that these men were too much alike? Did Harcourt think that the keen eyes of his brother would follow every thread in the intricate network of his scheme, and the subtle brain of his brother would apply itself to plotting against him?

But the coolness so apparent in Harcourt's reception of the returning wanderer made no impression whatever on that gentleman. Roderick Lowther stretched his long legs upon his brother's hearth-rug, and smoked his brother's cigars, with a serene indifference as to his brother's feelings.

"If you dine anywhere to-day you can take me with you." he

said blandly; "and to-morrow I'll introduce you to a splendid set of fellows at the 'Travellers.' You haven't thought of an address yet, I suppose?"

"No."

"Ah, you'll hit upon something in that way presently, I dare say, if you run your mind's eye over your visiting list. I'm in no hurry. Three months is a small eternity in these days of railroads and photography."

"And you really would marry?" said Harcourt again, very thoughtfully.

"Really would? Of course I would, if I could get the chance of making an advantageous match, and propitiate my aunt Dorothea by the sacrifice. You know how bent the prudent old lady has always been on my making a great marriage, and restoring the forgotten glories of the Lowthers. Yes, Harcourt, I come prepared for victory, and I trust to your brotherly friendship to help me to see and conquer."

"Humph! By the bye, I suppose you have heard nothing of—"

"Not a word," answered Roderick, rather hastily; "I know what you're going to talk about, and as that's rather an unpleasant subject to me, we may as well agree to avoid it. I wrote a letter, candid, explanatory, and so forth; promising to do what I considered my duty. I don't profess to be a generous man, and I freely acknowledge that I'm a very poor one; so the modest annual sum, which I considered my duty, was——well, *very modest!* However, the letter was unanswered. People drop through, you see," concluded Mr. Lowther the elder, blowing away a slender puff of blue vapour, as if he had been blowing away a troublesome subject; "and when people do, of their own election, drop through, I can't see that it's any fellow's duty to dig them up again. You haven't heard anything, I suppose?"

"Not a word."

"Fortunate for you! Sometimes that sort of person fastens on to one's relations. However, as I observed before, we'll agree to avoid the subject. Suppose we discuss your affairs?"

"I had much rather we did not."

"Of course, dear boy; but as I am candidly disposed myself, I don't mean to be kept in the dark by the most saturnine of brothers who ever sulked in the face of an amiable relative. You used to be engaged to an heiress—something in the Moorgate-Street line—Australian merchandise, wasn't it? a Miss Hillersdon, or Hillary, eh, dear boy? There used to be something of that sort on the cards, I believe?"

"There used to be, but there has ceased to be for the last eleven months. Will that do for you?"

"Ah, Miss Hillersdon—or Hillary—has jilted you, I suppose?"

"She has."

"And the man she has married—"

"Is my very good friend, the happy possessor of a charming wife and a large fortune, and the man at whose house I dine to-day."

"Oh!" exclaimed Roderick Lowther, lengthening the ejaculation to its extremest capacity of extension—"Oh, I think I begin to understand your policy. Miss Hillary has married a rich man, and you are intimate with the husband and *au mieux* with the wife. The husband is a sickly fellow—consumptive—apoplectic, eh, dear boy?"

"The husband is something over six feet high, and has the shoulders of a lifeguardsman; and, if it were not for his dissipated habits, might live to be ninety."

"Ah, if it were not for his dissipated habits. And you are his intimate friend? My dear Harcourt, what a very transparent game you are playing! and what a consummate fool you must be if you supposed that I shouldn't see through it! Why not a bond of union between us—all for one, and one for all, like Dumas's musketeers? Help me to find an heiress, and I'll help you *auprès de Mrs.* —, what's the lady's name, by the bye?"

Harcourt Lowther allowed this last piece of information to be screwed out of him, and parted with it as grudgingly as he had parted with the rest. It is not a pleasant thing when you are playing a very difficult game with the odds against you, to have an inconvenient brother swooping down upon you and insisting on looking over your hand.

There was no affection between these two brothers; the likeness which they bore to each other, morally as well as physically, seemed to have a blighting influence upon their relations. They knew each other, and they distrusted each other. Perhaps it would have been scarcely too much to say they hated each other.

But they went out to dinner together nevertheless, and Harcourt smilingly introduced his brother to Mrs. Tredethlyn and Miss Desmond. They had plenty of time to grow quite intimate in the drawing-room while they were waiting for Francis, who came in, flushed with a hurried toilet, at ten minutes to eight. He had been absent upon one of his mysterious excursions a little way out of town.

Roderick Lowther was received very graciously by the two ladies, and cordially welcomed by Mr. Tredethlyn. Harcourt, watching his brother ensconced in a nook of Maude's favourite ottoman, and discoursing at his ease upon Belgian notabilities, was troubled by dark misgivings of danger.

"I must find the fellow a quarry for himself," he thought. "or he'll be trying to stalk my game. He asks me to introduce him to an eligible *parti* as coolly as if life were a five-act comedy,

with the traditional heiress always waiting to fall a prey to the traditional adventurer. An heiress! in these days of marvellous commercial successes there must be such things as heiresses. But the question is where to look for them."

One of Mr. Tredethlyn's pompous retainers opened the drawing-room door at this moment and announced—

"Mr. and Miss Grunderson."

"Egad!" thought Harcourt Lowther, "there's the solution of my difficulty. Why not Miss Grunderson? Miss Grunderson is an heiress, or ought to be, if there is stability in any part of the commercial universe."

A young lady with a very rosy face, a young lady decidedly inclined to that quality which in the fair sex is elegantly entitled *embonpoint*, a young lady who was surrounded by surging flounces of pink areophae, dotted about with more pink rose-buds and larger full-blown roses than were ever worn by any young lady with a judicious recollection of the sweeps on May-day, bounced into the room, and bounced up to Mrs. Tredethlyn; while an elderly gentleman, who was evidently the young lady's papa, beamed mildly at the company across an enormous expanse of embroidered shirt-front and black waistcoat.

But in the network that Harcourt Lowther has woven Miss Grunderson is destined to be considerably entangled, and deserves to be introduced more ceremoniously in a fresh chapter.

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

### THE DIPLOMATIST'S POLICY.

THAT ponderous Mr. Grunderson, who plunged heavily down upon Maude's central ottoman, a miraculous combination of upholstery and floriculture—that shining bald-headed Mr. Grunderson, who sat placidly grinning at the company, and addressed his hostess as "Mum"—had begun life as a market-gardener; and, had Mrs. Tredethlyn been born some twenty years earlier, would have been proud to supply her with azaleas and camellias for the decoration of the ottoman upon which he was now sitting. The march of progress, and the accompanying march of bricks and mortar, had driven before them the cabbages and strawberry-beds, the cucumber-frames and young plantations of evergreens, by the cultivation of which Mr. Grunderson and his forefathers had lived comfortably upon one-o'clock dinners of fat bacon and indigestible dumplings, with occasional varieties of butcher's meat, thinking themselves passing rich when their ledgers showed a profit of two or three hundred pounds at the end of the year.

The march of civilization, or rather the march of the myr-

midons of that unreasoning despot, that implacable ruler, whom women call Fashion, always pushing westward, had contrived to push Mr. Grunderson's gardens off the face of the earth, and in so doing had set a Pactolus flowing steadily into Mr. Grunderson's pocket. The wealth poured in upon him with a rapidity which was like nothing but a fairy tale. That heroic Jack of the nursery story—who, by the bye, seems to have had no surname—never looked in more amazement on the bean-stalk that shot into the very skies in a single night, than did the honest market-gardener at the stuccoed district which had arisen, seven or eight stories and a campanello tower high, on the fields where he remembered execrating the slugs on dewy mornings a few years before. Where a prairie of bright red stocks had perfumed all the summer air with spicy odours, a square of stately mansions stared grimly at each other, and prime ministers' carriages rolled with meteor lamps through the midnight darkness. Where ragged children, and gaunt sunburnt women, in blucher-boots and with indescribable bonnets balanced on their freckled noses, had weeded strawberry-beds for a pitiful sixpence a day, duchesses trailed their silken trains and wearied of the rolling hours after the approved manner of their kind in the pages of the poets and romancers. The transformation was as perfect as it had been rapid; and instead of the cabbages and cabbage-roses, the cucumber-frames and hothouse flowers of his youth and early manhood, Mr. Grunderson found himself, at fifty years of age, proprietor of ground-rents that made him a millionaire. He had only one child, a daughter, who had been educated for some fifty pounds a year at a seminary for young ladies, in which she had been cruelly snubbed on account of her father's cabbages, and who was now determined to revenge herself on the companions of her blighted youth by the splendour of her womanhood. Led by this young lady, who was blessed with an energetic temperament and imperturbable good humour, Mr. Grunderson found himself, always more or less independently of his own agency, going through the complete formula of fashionable life according to his daughter Rosa's notion of that formula; which notion was extremely variable, and took its colour from the last acquaintance to whom the lively heiress was pleased to attach herself.

The very last just now happened to be Maude Tredethlyn, about whom Rosa was ready to go off into raptures at any moment, and whom she always spoke of as “a dear,” “a love,” or “a darling.” But there was a warm womanly heart beating under Rosa's fine dresses, and her raptures had more meaning in them than the raptures of enthusiastic young ladies are apt to have. She attached herself so effectually to Maude that Mrs. Tredethlyn was fain to forget, or at any rate to forgive,

the occasional lapses in her grammar, the unpleasant warmth of her fat little hands, which always came flopping down on the hands of her companion when she was enthusiastic, and the shadow of vulgarity which is so apt to accompany the sunshine of low-born liveliness.

Harcourt Lowther took an early opportunity to inform his elder brother that the young lady in pink areophane was an heiress, and an heiress well worthy the cultivation of any enterprising young diplomatist. Roderick was not slow to take the hint, but he was a great deal too much of a diplomatist to attempt any obvious angling for this rich prize. He exerted all his powers of fascination in order to make himself agreeable to Mrs. Tredeithlyn, and he did not address so much as one syllable of the most commonplace civility to the market-gardener's daughter; the consequence of which little manœuvre was, that as Rosa was sitting next to Maude all the evening, she listened open-mouthed to every word he uttered, and when she departed in her papa's three-hundred-guinea chariot—the market-gardener had insisted on possessing the traditional lemon-coloured chariot with hammer-cloth, and powdered retainers, which he had beheld and admired in his boyhood—she carried Roderick Lowther's image away with her.

It must be acknowledged, however, that it was no uncommon occurrence for Miss Grunderson to carry the image of some tolerably good-looking and passably well-mannered young man away from any festal gathering at which she happened to find herself. The good-humoured Rosa had a habit of falling desperately in love with any eligible person whom she encountered either in public or private life, who did anything to make himself notorious, or wore his hair long enough to be entitled a Being. A long list of Beings had occupied that sentimental caravansary which Miss Grunderson called her heart. She had been in love with all the poets, from the Laureate to Mr. Tupper; with all the novelists, from the great Sir Edward to the newest fledged of Mr. Mudie's popularities; and I fear she often fell in love with angels unawares in the shape of feminine romancers who were pleased to hide their gentle sex under masculine nomenclature. She had been in love—fathoms deep—with Lord Palmerston, Signor Mario, Sir Edwin Landseer, and Mr. Charles Mathews. She was wont to keep the three-hundred-guinea chariot waiting in Pall Mall for an hour at a stretch while she hunted Mr. Graves and his assistants for the last new portrait of her last new idol; and her room was like a good Catholic's chapel,—hung with the engraved effigies of an army of saints.

It was a very pure flame which burnt before so many shrines, and a very harmless one; and perhaps if Mr. Lowther the elder

had known Rosa Grunderson's little idiosyncrasies, he would not have felt quite so complacently triumphant in the consciousness that her round grey eyes had been fixed upon him all the evening with the fond gaze of hero-worship. Harcourt contrived to swell this triumph by artful little brotherly compliments, as the two young men walked Londonwards under the starlit summer sky, smoking their regalias, and talking as men about town do talk under those sublime stars. Sentimental Rosa was gazing at those luminous unknown worlds from the covert of the pinkest curtains in Stuccoville, and thinking about *Him!* Rosa's last adoration was always mysteriously alluded to under cover of a personal pronoun. Her admiration for Roderick Lowther was multiplied a hundredfold by the young diplomatist's disregard of her. Poor Rosa had been accustomed to be made the object of what, in the argotic parlance of her age, she called "a dead set," on account of her papa's ground-rents; and she was inclined to imagine Mr. Lowther the noblest and most disinterested of mankind because he did not commence this "dead set" immediately after being introduced to her.

"I wonder whether he knows that I'm the Miss Grunderson?" she thought, as she looked up at those romantic stars so familiar to her in her *Byron*. "Of course he does, though 'Pa is *so* different from the rest of society, that people always know there's some reason for his being where he is, and they're not very long guessing that the reason is money. Will anybody ever want to marry me for my own sake, I wonder? Ah, how I wish the Marquis of Westminster would fall in love with me! *He* couldn't want pa's ground-rents."

Thus the maiden mused in her bower, while Roderick Lowther, encouraged by his junior, talked complacently of his conquest.

"She's the simplest little thing in Christendom," he said; "simpler than—anybody I ever met in my life. The disinterested game is the dodge in that quarter, dear boy. Do you remember how Frederic Soulié's *Lion* treats the little shopkeeper's daughter? First with the elegant devotion of a fashionable Romeo, then with the *brusquerie* of a Benedick or a Petruchio. *Lise Lalotine* died under the treatment; but I don't think the plump Rosa is made of quite such ethereal stuff. *nia Petite* is sentimental, and wants to be loved for herself alone; 'O, wert thou in the cauld blast!' 'And long he mourned, the Lord of Burleigh;' and that sort of thing. She shall have it, the darling innocent! Tennyson and Owen Meredith by the *kilo*, disinterested devotion by the bushel. But oh, my Harcourt, do not lure your loving brother into the quag-mire of delusive wealth! Make sure that our simple-looking

Grunderson does not hide the cloven hoof of insolvency under the golden fleece in which he drapes himself: those simple-looking men generally fail for half a million. I like your Mrs. Tredethlyn, by the bye; she is very pretty and very elegant; but, to be candid, my dear Harcourt—a brother ought to be candid, you know, even at the risk of being unpleasant—I fancy there is more in the husband than you imagine. A man with such a chest must have some solidity in his composition. If I am anything of a physiologist, it is not in that man's organization to be made a fool of. Ah, I see you don't care to talk about it; you like to keep your own secrets, and play your own game without backers or advisers. So be it. For myself, I am of an open disposition; I like to talk of my own affairs when they go smoothly, and to drop them when they take the crooked course. I don't suppose Napoleon the First was very fond of talking about Waterloo. He forgot *that* little skirmish, you may depend; and talked of Arcola and Lodi, the Pyramids, Austerlitz, Wagram, and Auerstadt. I dare say Mr. Merry holds his tongue about those two-thousand-guinea colts that *didn't* win the Derby. People are *not* eloquent about their failures. I shall look up my old aunt early to-morrow morning; and after that, if you have any excuse for calling on Mrs. Tredethlyn, I shall be glad to accompany you. Unless I am very much at fault in feminine psychology, Miss Grunderson will drop in upon her friend, to discuss my bearish behaviour, on the earliest opportunity. Nothing impresses a sentimental young person so favourably as downright rudeness. The heroine in a lady's novel always adores the man who snubs her."

Thus argued the diplomatist by profession, strolling Strandwards in the starlight; while the diplomatist by organization listened quietly, and thought his own thoughts as regarded this grand conquest, of which his kinsman was so proud. Harcourt Lowther was not apt to resent the insolent *insouciance*, the calm assurance of superiority, with which his senior treated him, and indeed had treated him from that early boyhood in which the lads had played together at Eton. But the wrongs that rankle deeply in a man's breast are sometimes those which he endures silently. Harcourt believed that his own prospects had been sacrificed to the advancement of Roderick; and he was not sorry when the elder son went wild, and turned his back as coolly upon his father as if he had never been the pampered favourite of weak love, the all-absorbing drain upon a limited income. In every way Roderick had fared better than his brother. Lowther Hall, surrounded by park and farm-lands that constituted an estate of some three hundred acres, might not be worth very much to a man of large ideas and lofty inspirations; but whatever it was worth, it was tightly entailed

upon the heir of the Lowthers, and not so much as a game-keeper's cottage or a scrap of meadow-land was reserved for the luckless junior. Mrs. Lowther had been mistress of a small fortune, but that had been spent on the education of the two young men,—Harcourt in this matter, as in all others, going to the wall; for his University career had been cut short in order that his brother's debts might be paid, and that extravagant gentleman be enabled to face the big-wigs of his college without fear of clamorous creditors, and read at leisure for a degree which he was too lazy to succeed in getting. After this Harcourt's prospects had again been sacrificed, and the young barrister, unable to live at the bar, had been fain to accept an ensign's commission; while Roderick, pushed into the diplomatic world by a desperate effort of family interest, exhibited his handsome face at the Prussian Court, and squandered every farthing that he could screw out of his father's slender purse. When the purse had become as empty as it well could, there had been the usual remonstrances, the usual bad feeling which is likely to arise between an utterly selfish and unprincipled young man and the father who is no longer able to be of any use to him, and who takes the liberty of resenting the extravagance which has involved his later life in difficulties.

Besides the advantages obtained from his father's partiality, Roderick Lowther had been the favourite of a maiden aunt of miserly habits and independent fortune, who had condescended to give him her name at the baptismal font, and who had never bestowed on him anything else—except, indeed, a neat cloth-bound copy of "The Dairyman's Daughter," presented to the lad one birthday, and promptly disposed of at a rag-and-bone shop in the High Street of Harrow for the small sum of four-pence. But although Miss Dorothea Burnett had not been very liberal in her donations to her favourite nephew during her lifetime, it was supposed that, after her departure from this world, the young man would reap the reward of occasional dutifully-worded letters and affected deference to her wishes, and that the reward would be a very substantial one; for Miss Burnett had contrived to swell her own little fortune by many stray windfalls in the way of legacies from relatives, whose regard her busy married sister Mrs. Lowther had neglected to cultivate. Beyond this, the maiden lady had bought small but profitable tenements, and had dabbled a little in shares; and she had watched her small investments with an intelligence, and nursed them with a tenderness, which her stockbroker had admiringly declared to be a credit to the sex she adorned by her commercial acumen.

So Roderick Lowther, finding his younger brother on the field, was alarmed by the idea that he might have been under-

mined in this direction, and was by no means inclined to lose any time before presenting himself to his spinster aunt. He brushed and curled his amber whiskers with more than usual circumspection, therefore, on the morning after the dinner at Mrs. Tredethlyn's; and walking through Covent Garden, on his way to Miss Burnett's Bloomsbury hermitage, he expended sixpence on a hothouse flower to put in the button-hole of the dark-blue coat which he wore under a flimsy outer garment of pale grey. He had dressed himself very carefully, for he knew that, in spite of the maiden lady's lectures on the subject of prudence, her feminine eye was fascinated by the elegant friv-  
ilities which she affected to disapprove.

Miss Burnett occupied a very big house in the dullest street in Bloomsbury—a dismal *cul de sac*, in which there was almost always an elderly organ-grinder playing "Home, sweet home," or the "Old Hundredth," with a little group of squalid children gathered round him. The big house smelt like a tomb, and was almost as rarely opened as if it had been one; for the butcher-boy who brought Miss Burnett's mutton-chop, or the half-pound of steak or three-quarters of liver, upon which Miss Burnett's servant was wont to make her repast, handed his wares across the area-gate, and exchanged no word of comment with the grim damsels who received them, knowing very well that the lady of the house sat at her favourite window in the front parlour, with her open Bible before her, and a watchful eye upon the outer world, which some sentimental Christians might have thought scarcely consistent with so much piety.

The grim damsels who admitted Roderick Lowther to Miss Burnett's darksome abode relaxed her ordinary sternness of visage into something faintly resembling a smile as she recognized her mistress's nephew.

"Your aunt has been very ill since you were last here, Mr. Lowther," the woman said, in answer to Roderick's inquiry. "She was very bad with her asthma all the winter; but the warm spring weather brought her round again."

"Yes," thought the young man, "the spring weather always does bring her round,—and always will, I suppose, till I am dead and in my grave."

He was ushered into the dining-room while this irreverent idea was in his mind; and the next minute he was seated opposite to his aunt, inquiring tenderly about her asthma. The dining-room was very dismal. There was more mahogany furniture and brown damask than is compatible with the smallest ray of cheerfulness, and the walls were rendered ghastly by some hideous preparations painted in asphaltum, and exhibiting gigantic cracks that looked like gory, yawning wounds,—preparations which, on account of their smoky nature and revolting

choice of subject, were supposed to be the work of the old masters.

"I am very glad to see you, my dear Roderick," said Miss Burnett, gravely; "as glad as I can be about anything in this carnal life," added the old lady, whose spirits had been revived that morning by a rise of one and a quarter per cent. in the value of her pet investment. "But we are taught not to rejoice, Roderick, except in that which—Is that a hothouse flower, my dear?" inquired Miss Burnett, looing sharply at the myosotis in her nephew's button-hole. "Dear, dear! what an extravagant age it is! You are looking very well, my dear Roderick. I dare say you are what a worldly-minded person would call very handsome; but we must try to remember that we are all worms," murmured the old lady with a doleful sigh; for she took the gloomy view of things which is so common to some people who read that Gospel which is all life and colour and brightness, full of the happy faces of merry-makers at a bridal festival, and little children gathering round a favourite Teacher's knees, radiant with sudden rejoicings in mourning households, the dead restored to smile upon the living. There is something strange in the dull grey tint which some worshippers are able to infuse into a story that a painter can hardly read without feeling the tropical heat of a meridian sun, the perfume of a thousand lilies, the spicy odours of the feathery palms, and the free dash of Galilee's blue waves about the prow of a fisherman's frail bark sailing gaily under an Eastern sky. Surely the richness of colour with which the Catholic Church invests the Christian faith is, after all, only the natural attribute of a religion which arose amid the splendour and beauty of the Holy Land!

"I hope, my dear Roderick," said the maiden lady, very solemnly, "that while absent in those idolatrous foreign lands, you kept the promise which you gave me before leaving England."

"My dear aunt," murmured the young man, who had quite forgotten having made any promise whatever to his pious relative, and was painfully mystified by this address, "I assure you that I—"

He would have broken down here, but the lady came to his rescue.

"Don't prevaricate, Roderick!" she exclaimed, sternly. "Did you, or did you not, enter a Roman Catholic place of worship during your sojourn among the high priests of Baal? Did you, or did you not, sit under one of those idolatrous worshippers of stocks and stones? And oh, that I should live to see candlesticks on the altar of a church in this very neighbourhood!" cried Miss Burnett, with a sudden burst of indignation; "and to

hear snuffling, which I at first attributed to a cold in the head, but afterwards ascertained to be the wicked workings of ROME!"

The stanch Dorothea paused for a few moments to recover her indignation, and then tackled her nephew once more.

"You promised me, before going to Belgium, that you would not, however tempted, enter a Roman Catholic place of worship," she said.

"And I did *not*, my dear aunt," answered Roderick, promptly; "I give you my word of honour as a gentleman." "Nor any other place of worship," thought the heir, as his aunt nodded approvingly.

And then there was a little more talk, chiefly taking the form of a catechism, which Mr. Lowther went through triumphantly, since his answers to the old lady's inquiries were shaped in accordance with his knowledge of what was likely to please his aunt, rather than with any reference to actual fact. But a man must do a good many mean things when he devotes himself to the cultivation of a narrow-minded maiden aunt, for the chance of inheriting small tenements and first-preference bonds in flourishing railway companies. Roderick Lowther breathed a long sigh of relief when he left the house that smelt like a tomb behind him, after drinking a glass of his aunt's dry sherry, which act of devotion was in itself no small penance.

He hailed a hansom as soon as he was safely beyond ken of the observant spinster, and was rattled back to his brother's lodgings, where he found Harcourt pondering moodily over the "Times" newspaper, and whence the same hansom drove the two Antipholi to Stuccoville.

Mr. Tredethlyn was out, but Mrs. Tredethlyn was at home. Harcourt went into his friend's study to write a note; while Roderick followed a servant to the drawing-rooms, in the smallest and cosiest of which three gorgeous apartments the diplomatist found Maude and Rosa seated side by side on a low sofa, while proud Julia meditated apart at the window.

"You're the lady I should like to marry," thought Roderick, as he looked at Julia's dark face, which lighted up for a moment with her flashing smile, as she bowed to him, and then relapsed into gloom; "there'd be some pleasure in taming *you*. Who would care to cage a robin? but there would be some glory in subduing the spirit of an eagle."

Thus mused Mr. Lowther, while he murmured some commonplace remark upon the beauty of the summer day, and dropped himself lazily into a seat near Maude Tredethlyn. He was true to his tactics of the night before, and addressed his remarks almost entirely to Maude and Julia. When he did descend to address the vivacious Rosa, he did so in a manner that was a delicate admixture of the intellectual bearishness of one of poor

Miss Brontë's heroes with the lively banter of a Benedick. The result of this policy was triumphant, and the market-gardener's daughter plunged deeper and deeper still into her five-and-twentieth hopeless attachment.

While Mr. Lowther the elder was cultivating his own interests in the drawing-room, Mr. Lowther the younger was pacing up and down Francis Tredethlyn's study in no happy frame of mind. Imagine the feelings of a Mephistopheles who begins to suspect that his victim has slipped away from him. Harcourt was beginning to feel very doubtful as to the firmness of his hold on his pupil and companion.

Francis Tredethlyn's conduct for the last few weeks had quite baffled his friend's penetration. The Cornishman had grown suddenly preoccupied and reserved. He might still be seen in the haunts of the Bohemians—for Mr. Lowther took care that he should not easily extricate himself from the bonds that he had allowed to be coiled about him; but Francis, always unwilling to be led into the scenes where he had no pleasure, was now more unwilling than ever, and Harcourt found it very difficult to play the game he wanted to play without showing his cards. If it had been a mere question of plucking so many feathers from an innocent pigeon, the thing might have been done easily enough, perhaps; but Mr. Lowther evidently wanted something more than his friend's golden plumage. It seemed, indeed, as if he would be satisfied with nothing less than the utter ruin and degradation of Maude Tredethlyn's husband.

To-day, walking up and down the study, whose broad plate-glass window commanded an agreeable view of a stony quadrangle and the roofs and chimneys of a mews, Harcourt thought very despondently of that grand scheme to which he had devoted himself so patiently since his return to England.

"What secret is the fellow hiding from me?" he thought, resentfully; "he refused to dine with me to-day, and he threw over the party I made for Greenwich the day before yesterday. He has made no book for the York summer, and yet he is less at home than ever. What does it all mean? Can he have gone to the bad in real earnest at last, and without any help from me? There must be something in it; but what is the something?"

Tired at last of such meditations as these, Harcourt Lowther flung himself into a chair to compose the letter he had talked about writing when he entered the study.

He wrote his note, which was very brief, and the gist of which was to remind Francis of some engagement that would entail the usual champagne drinking, the usual squandering of money for the gratification of the worthless society in which a few innocent pigeons abandoned themselves to be plucked without mercy.

by every species of predatory fowl. After having written this little note, so carefully worded that no print of the fiend's hoof could have been deciphered therein by uninitiated eyes, Harcourt Lowther sat with his elbow on the table, biting the feather of his pen, and ruminating moodily. There were open letters and tradesmen's bills lying about upon Francis Tredethlyn's disorderly writing-table. Mr. Lowther flung aside his pen presently, and amused himself by a careless examination of these documents. Some of the bills were heavy ones, but not so heavy as to make any very serious inroad upon the Cornishman's fortune, and Harcourt tossed them away from him one after the other, uninterested in their details, unconcerned by their sum-totals, until he came to a dead stop all at once at the first line of a document which seemed to him to bear an extraordinary significance.

This document was the bill of a fashionable upholsterer, and the line below the tradesman's name and address ran thus:

"For goods supplied to Francis Tredethlyn, Esq., at Brook Cottage, Petersham, June 20th, 185—;" and then followed a list of the furniture for a cottage, the sum-total of which came to little more than three hundred pounds.

"So," muttered Mr. Lowther, "I think I have fallen upon the clue to the mystery. We will go and look at Mr. Tredethlyn's furnished cottage."

He wrote the address on a tablet in his *portemonnaie*, and went up-stairs to the drawing-room, where he found Roderick intolerably at his ease in the society of the three ladies. There was an arrangement made for a meeting in Maude's roomy box at Covent Garden, to which Mrs. Tredethlyn was fain to invite the affectionate Rosa, who clung to her with peculiar fondness to-day: and then the two gentlemen took their departure; Roderick to look in at the "Travellers'" and the "St. James's;" Harcourt to hurry post-haste—or rather hansom-cab haste—to the Waterloo terminus, whence he took the train for Richmond.

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## CHAPTER XXXII.

### HARCOURT GATHERS HIS FIRST FRUITS.

THE party in Mrs. Tredethlyn's opera-box that evening was a very pleasant one. Whatever business had taken Harcourt Lowther to Richmond must have been tolerably satisfactory in its result, for that gentleman's spirits were gayer than usual as he stood behind Maude's chair in the shadow of the crimson curtain, talking to her under cover of all those crashing choruses and grand orchestral effects which Meyerbeer must surely have

composed with a view to comfortable conversation. Miss Grunderson was gorgeous in thirty guineas worth of blue moiré antique à la Watteau, and exhibited a small fortune in the way of lace and artificial flowers upon her plump little person. Her diamond earrings were the biggest in the opera-house; though it must be confessed that a straw-coloured tint, which the connoisseur repudiates, pervaded the gems that the market-gardener had bought for his daughter—size, rather than purity of water, being the quality for which Mr. Grunderson selected his diamonds. Nothing could be more striking than the contrast between Maude's simple toilet of white silk and Rosa's gaudy **splendour.**

But Miss Grunderson was very happy this evening, for the delightful Roderick condescended to talk to her, while his brother was engrossed by Mrs. Tredehlyn. He was not very polite, but Rosa thought him positively charming. She had learnt to understand the emptiness of the attentions that had been paid to her by enterprising young bachelors, who thought that an alliance with the great Grunderson's daughter would be a very pleasant starting-point on the high-road of life; but she did not understand that there might come a man wise enough to eschew vain flatteries and all the ordinary allurements of the vulgar fortune-hunter, and yet designing enough to spread his nets for any heiress worthy of his ambition.

In his conversation with the simple-minded Rosa he affected the sentiments of a confirmed misogynist.

"If there were such a possibility as a sensible woman," he said, "I might perhaps hope to end my days in the bosom of a family; but since the age of miracles is past, I resign myself to the idea of remaining a lonely wanderer until the day of my death."

Thus, half in despondency, half in bitterness, Roderick Lowther replied to some leading remark of Miss Grunderson's. She called him a horrid man and a dreadful creature: but she admired him amazingly notwithstanding, and she felt a seraph' happiness in listening to this delightful cynical being, to t  
utter neglect of Meyerbeer.

"With the exception of public characters," mused the market-gardener's daughter, "I don't think I was ever *really* in love until now."

And thus it fell out that, when Mrs. Tredehlyn said, in the course of the evening, that she was going to spend the following day at Twickenham, Rosa gave such broad hints about the loveliness of the weather, and the delights of suburban scenery, that good-natured Maude promised to take her down for a long afternoon among the roses in the dear old garden where so much of her own happy youth had been idled away.

"Are droppers-in to be permitted in your Arcadia, ladies?" demanded Harcourt; "and will the balls and mallets be considered out of place upon the lawn by the river?"

This was quite enough for Miss Grunderson, who cried out directly that of all things in the world she admired croquet, and that "Par" had bought her a set of Cremer's most exquisite walnut-wood balls and mallets. There were times when the vivacious Rosa called her indulgent parent "Par," in spite of those half-dozen annual accounts which he had paid for the young lady's education.

"I shall so enjoy a game of croquet in a real garden!" cried Rosa. "We play it in the square sometimes; but the little boys and the bakers' and butchers' young men outside the rails are so dreadfully trying, especially when the balls won't go where one wants them, owing to nervousness; and I'm sure it's enough to make anybody nervous to have a strange chimney-sweep calling out, 'Well done, butter-fingers!' if one drops a mallet; and *that* square-keeper is never within sight when wanted."

"Does Tredethlyn go with you to-morrow?" asked Harcourt Lowther presently; he had been very thoughtful for the last few minutes.

"No," Maude answered, rather sadly. "I asked Frank to drive me down in the mail-phæton; but he told me he was going a little way out of town on business."

She was thinking how very great a change had come to pass since her husband had been her adoring slave, only too happy to follow wherever she pleased to lead him. Now there was no quarrel, no actual misunderstanding between them; but there was quite a wide breach, as if they had agreed to separate after a long series of domestic battles.

"Roderick and I will come down to the Cedars to-morrow," said Harcourt, bending over Maude's chair, "unless you forbid us to do so. The river is delightful just now, and you may want the services of a couple of boatmen."

"We shall be very glad to see you, if you like to come," Mrs. Tredethlyn answered, carelessly. Looking up just then, she saw Miss Grunderson's round eyes fixed upon her with a very earnest expression. Rosa had heard all sorts of insinuations respecting Mr. Lowther's constant attendance upon Mrs. Tredethlyn, and the young lady was wondering whether her darling Maude did really deserve any of the reprobation that had been showered upon her as a flirting matron.

"There's a way of saying 'How do you do?' or 'Pretty well, thanks,' that seems like flirting," mused Miss Grunderson; "and Mr. Lowther always has that way when he talks to Mrs. Tredethlyn. I know she is too good to be a flirt, in spite of all

those malicious people may say about her; and I don't like Harcourt Lowther a bit, for he must know how his flirting manner is talked about, though she doesn't. I've seen half-a-dozen opera-glasses turned this way to-night, just because he's been bending over her chair in that whispering way of his. And yet he has only been talking of croquet."

Rosa's friendship was quite as ardent as her love, and much more lasting. Mrs. Tredethlyn's gentleness had quite subdued that affectionate little heart, and the market-gardener's daughter would have been willing to make any effort in her friend's service. She was a very energetic little girl, with a good deal of that moral courage which is sometimes wanting in more delicate natures. To put the fact in her own words, Rosa was able to speak her mind, and to speak it very freely too, whenever the occasion called for candour.

The next day was one of the brightest in a brilliant July, and Mrs. Tredethlyn's shell-shaped barouche was waiting before the ponderous stuccoed portico at eleven o'clock. Francis had left the house half an hour before on foot, bent on that mysterious expedition a little way out of town which he took so frequently now. Maude and Julia came down-stairs at a quarter after eleven; and Miss Grunderson skipped up the stone steps two minutes afterwards, with the bluest bonnet and the pinkest parasol in London.

"How do you like the new contrast?" she inquired, twirling the pink parasol triumphantly, when she had adjusted her flounces and furbelows to the best of her ability on the front seat of Mrs. Tredethlyn's carriage. "I remember, when I was at school, pink and blue together were thought bad taste, but now they're quite *de rigueur*. Ness pas ker say joli dong? s'p'tite ombrelle?" demanded Miss Grunderson, bursting into French. "Vingt-huit shillings, ma chère! Ness pas trèscher, chère? Et le boutiquier ne voudrait pas prendre un six-sous là-dessous, quoique je l'ai marchandé comme un juif," she added, with a slap-dash rendering of the language which was peculiar to her.

The summer day was delightful, and Maude's spirits, which had been rather depressed of late, rose with the sunshine and the pure air, as the high-stepping bays left Stuccoville behind them for the pleasant country road, and the rustic odours of suburban gardens. And then, when she found herself amongst her own birds and flower-beds, it was hard to believe that she was no longer a girl, with a girl's careless happiness in beautiful things. She sat under a great drooping willow, whose lowest branches dipped into the water, and watched her dogs gambolling with Rosa on the grass.

"I was like that, once," she thought, "before I knew of

papa's difficulties—before I sold myself for money. I fancied that it was a heroic thing to marry the man I did not love, in the hope that my esteem might be some poor repayment of his generous devotion—his noble trust in my father. But I know now that I could do him no baser wrong than become his wife I know it now, when he himself has learnt to despise and to avoid me, even when I am anxious to win back his regard."

Yes, it had come to this. Maude Tredethlyn deeply felt her husband's palpable avoidance of her. So long as he had been slavishly devoted, she had been just a little inclined to despise him; but now that the treasure of an honest man's love seemed to have slipped away from her, she awoke to the consciousness that it was a treasure, and that she had need to be unhappy in the loss of a jewel that is not given to every woman to possess. She sickened at the thought of the wealth which her marriage had given her, now that it was unsanctified by the love of the giver. Was it gone, that devoted affection which she had held so lightly while it was hers to throw away? She began to understand now how delicate a thing a heart is, even when it beats beneath the rudest breast, and how soon it withers under the blighting influence of disdain. Yes, she had been faithfully loved by an honest man who would have given his very life for her happiness, and she had trifled with his love until it was lost. Queen Guinivere has only one set of diamonds to throw into the river; and when the passion has passed in whose hot impulse she flung them away, the lady is apt to regret her lost jewels.

Miss Desmond and Miss Grunderson trifled with the balls and mallets, while Maude wandered listlessly on the terrace thinking of the breach between herself and her husband. She was still lingering there alone, when Harcourt and Roderick Lowther strolled from the drawing-room on to the lawn. The eldest set about instructing Julia Desmond and Miss Grunder-son with regard to the latest and most intricate by-laws of croquet; and the younger made his way at once to the terrace where Maude was walking listlessly and slowly under a coquettish white umbrella.

Harcourt Lowther took care that Mrs. Tredethlyn had no more time for solitary musing. He brought all his talents to bear to keep her amused, and by the aid of fashionable small-talk, sharp little criticisms on new books, croquet, luncheon, and an incursion among Mr. Hillary's hothouses, he contrived to chase the shadow of care quite away from the young wife's girlish brow. It was about four o'clock, and the afternoon had lapsed into a sultry sleepy brightness that was almost oppressive even in that green retreat beside the river, when the two gentlemen suggested the water.

"Of all things in the world the most delightful!" screamed

Miss Grunderson. "Oh, do please take us out in one of those darling little dangerous-looking boats I saw in the Swiss boat-house down there. And oh, what a pity I didn't wear a hat instead of this odious blue bonnet, which is beginning to fly already!" said Rosa, looking despondently at the expansive ribands fluttering below her double chin, which had lost some little of their azure intensity under the influence of the July sun. To Miss Grunderson's great delight, the two gentlemen proceeded forthwith to the boat-house, and lowered a couple of wherries, as perfect in their way as any craft that ever came out of the hands of Messrs. Messenger. Harcourt placed Mrs. Tredethlyn and Julia Desmond in one of these boats, and to the other descended Miss Grunderson, with more small shrieks of terror and feminine skirmishing, and a greater display of Balmoral boots and embroidered flounces than was absolutely necessary to the embarkation.

"I never get into a boat without thinking I shall be drowned," said Rosa, plumping down upon the cushions, and all but upsetting herself at the first start; "the water does give way so. But if one *was* drowned, it would be rather nice to have a paragraph all to one's self in the daily newspapers, or perhaps what pa calls a social leader, beginning with something about the Moloch Pleasure having swallowed another victim, and Youth at the prow and Pleasure at the helm, and the Pale Horse, and so on."

And then Miss Grunderson, finding herself quite alone with the latest object of her adoration, exerted all her small fascinations to beguile the woman-hater from his stern aversion to her sex. She chattered as gaily as some talking-bird; and Roderick Lowther, who imagined that he had by this time established himself firmly as a disinterested individual, condescended to make himself agreeable, and to drift into that pleasant current of meaningless small-talk which malicious people call flirtation.

While Roderick rowed his fair companion swiftly past the verdant bank, Harcourt let his boat drift slowly down with the current, only dipping his oars now and then in the intervals of his discourse. Maude had forgotten her troubled reverie upon the terrace, and gave herself up to the enjoyment of all the old talk about books and music, poetry and painting, which had been so delicious to her in those departed days when she and Harcourt had drifted down that same river plighted husband and wife. There is no monitor so sharp as rural nature when we have need to be reminded of our inconstancy. Looking at those reedy banks, those tranquil gardens sloping to a tranquil tide, Maude found it almost difficult to believe in the changes of her life since she had first floated down that stream, a child.

with wild-flowers in her lap, and her little bare arm hanging across the edge of the boat, for the infantile pleasure of splashing.

Harcourt Lowther found his brother's boat moored to a little quay in a shady corner of the river below the Star and Garter, and the splendid colouring of Miss Grunderson's toilet made that young lady conspicuous as she ascended a little pathway sloping upwards to the terrace, attended by her cavalier. Harcourt shipped his oars, and proposed a stroll in the Petersham meadows. Maude looked at her watch; it was a quarter to five, and Mr. Hillary's dinner-hour was half-past seven. There was plenty of time for a stroll across those verdant meadows, and Mrs. Tredethlyn, having the interval to dispose of somehow, had only to choose in wasting it in this way or in some other fashion. Harcourt had his wish therefore. He assisted the two ladies to disembark, gave his coat into the custody of one of the lounging watermen at the rustic landing-stage, and then strolled with his two companions into the meadows leading towards Petersham.

There is little need to tell the English reader what Petersham is like. Almost everybody knows that rural cluster of modern villas and grand old red brick mansions nestling so comfortably under the shadow of Richmond Hill. Surely the next best thing to inhabiting Earl Russell's house in Richmond Park, or that magic château of Monsieur Fould's, hidden deep in the woody heart of grand old St. Germain's, would be to own one of those Georgian mansions at Petersham, with cool fishponds and shady gardens, long ranges of narrow windows, and a marble-paved vestibule, with a ceiling by Thornhill, and old family portraits by polite Sir Joshua himself. It was the afternoon of afternoons for listless dawdling about such a place as Petersham, and Mr. Lowther and the two ladies were alike enthusiastic in their admiration of the Georgian mansions.

"I wish Francis would buy a nice old house down here," said Maude. "I am so tired of London; it is all the same thing over, and over, and over again; the same flock of sheep jumping through the same gap in the same hedge, and not one of them —no, not even the leader—knowing why they do it. I should be near papa here, and all my old friends. In town I seem to know everybody, and yet not to have a single friend."

There was a rustic bench in the lane through which they were walking as Maude said this. The two ladies sat down to rest for a few minutes, and Harcourt Lowther took out his cigar-case.

"I shall leave you just long enough to smoke a cigarette," he said, "and then I will take you back to the water-side by a still prettier road, if you like."

He went away at a leisurely pace, lighting his cigar as he went; but he walked a good deal faster when he was out of Maude Tredethlyn's ken, and he was flushed with heat when he returned after a quarter of an hour's absence.

"Now, ladies," he said, "if we are not to keep Mr. Hillary waiting for his dinner, it is high time for us to go back to the boat."

Maude and Julia rose, and the little party strolled into the road at the end of the lane in the straggling order usual to people who walk for their own pleasure in a country village. Mrs. Tredethlyn's white umbrella was a little way ahead of her companions, when Harcourt Lowther laid his gloved hand lightly upon Julia's shoulder.

She looked up at him, startled by the gesture.

"You have had some reason to complain of your friend Miss Hillary and Francis Tredethlyn," he said. "I am going to give you your revenge."

Julia stared in amazement at the speaker; but he did not wait to be interrogated.

"Come, Mrs. Tredethlyn," he said, "your papa will have to wait for his dinner, unless you walk a little faster."

He had not much reason to complain of Maude, who had been ahead of him until this moment, but he hurried her along the dusty road until, at a spot where it curved round to the river, he stopped suddenly, pointing to a cottage-garden, seen through the iron rails of a high old-fashioned gate set in a framework of clematis.

"Look at that, Mrs. Tredethlyn! Isn't it a pretty picture?"

It was a little rustic *tableau* composed of two figures grouped under a mulberry-tree,—a delicate-looking woman, with soft brown hair, touched here and there with a glimmer of gold, seated on a rustic bench. Her face was turned away from the road, and she was looking up at a man who leaned against the trunk of a tree. It was only a glimpse of this picture which Maude caught between the iron scroll-work of the gate, but she saw quite enough.

The man was Francis Tredethlyn.

"Great Heaven!" exclaimed Harcourt Lowther, in an audible whisper; "it is Francis!"

Maude looked at him with a vague alarm in her face, which had grown almost as white as the umbrella that sheltered it. Harcourt's whisper had frightened her a hundredfold more than the sight of her husband, at home in that unknown garden with a woman she had never seen or heard of.

"Who is that lady?" she asked, when they had passed the gate. "Do you know her, Mr. Lowther? You know all my husband's associates much better than I do."

She tried to speak quite calmly, but failed miserably in the effort. Harcourt's whisper had expressed so much.

"No, I do not know the lady," he answered, gravely. "I think you had better make no inquiries about her. Mr. Tredethlyn did not tell *you* that he was to spend the day at Petersham?"

"No. He only said that he was going a little way out of town."

"Then in that case it will be better for you to leave him to finish his day as he pleases, since you have made no arrangement for meeting him here, and do not know the lady."

Maude did not answer him just then. She walked on a little faster than before; and Harcourt kept by her side, looking furtively every now and then at the pale profile, the tremulous lower lip. He could see that Mrs. Tredethlyn was profoundly agitated, and that she was trying to conceal her agitation. He could see this; and he was determined to make her speak, and speak freely.

"She is not the sort of woman to suffer in silence," he thought. "This kind of trouble is new to her, and she will cry out presently."

Mr. Lowther was not very much at fault in his estimate of Maude's heroism. She spoke to him when they were a few paces from Julia, whose face was lighted by a look of triumph under her gauzy veil.

"You say you do not know that lady. You must at least know who she is?"

This was said in a tone of almost piteous entreaty.

"Upon my honour, no," Harcourt answered, gravely.

There was a pause for some moments. They were in one of the meadows by this time, nearing the water's edge, Julia still in the rear, and Maude still walking very fast, as it is the habit of most people to walk under the influence of agitation. Perhaps in that unreasoning, unnecessary haste, there links a vague fancy that we can hurry away from our trouble.

All at once Maude turned to Harcourt Lowther and laid her hand upon his arm.

"Tell me what it all means," she cried,—"tell me the worst, however bad it is. I know that you are hiding something from me. I know by your manner just now that there is some horrible meaning in Frank's presence in that garden with that woman."

"My dear Mrs. Tredethlyn, you ask me to interfere in a matter which I have no right to approach. It may be everything to you where your husband goes,—whom he associates with. I have been his friend,—for your sake; and I have done my best to steer him clear of dangerous acquaintance and dan-

gerous amusements—still for your sake. I may have found it a hard matter to keep him out of mischief, and may have regretted the natural tendencies of his character—always for your sake. Beyond this I can have nothing to do with him. I had good reason for being sorry when you married him—on my own account. Of late I have been even more sorry—on yours."

Maude looked at him, white and trembling. The schemer was pleased to see what deadly mischief had been done, and yet stung to the very heart to find that any falsehood of his victim's could wound so deeply. There are triumphs which have a shadow of humiliation upon their brightness, and this was one of them. Julia, seeing that her companions were loitering, seated herself on the lower step of a stile. She had no desire to interrupt this conversation.

"Speak to me plainly," Mrs. Tredethlyn cried, passionately, "or I will go back to that cottage and ask my husband himself for an explanation. Perhaps that would be best. He has a better right to explain his conduct than any one else."

She walked a few paces from her companion; but Harcourt Lowther followed her, and caught her gently by the arm.

"Will Francis Tredethlyn tell you the truth if you question him?" he asked. "My dear Mrs. Tredethlyn, how could you endure the *esclandre* of such a scene as *must* ensue if you go back to that house, and confront your husband in the presence of that woman?"

"Why should there be a scene, or any *esclandre*? The lady may be the wife or daughter of some friend of my husband's. Have I any right to imagine something horrible because I see Frank with a person who is a stranger to me? It was only your manner that frightened me."

"I am very sorry my manner was so foolish. Let us drop the subject. Only—take my advice—don't go back to that house."

"Why should I not, if my husband is innocent? as I am sure he is."

Mr. Lowther shrugged his shoulders.

"Because it is an unpleasant thing to intrude where one is not invited," he answered. "Whatever questions you wish to ask your husband can be reserved until you are both at home; and in the meantime pray let the matter drop. Believe me, it is not a fit subject for discussion between you and me."

There are lawyers who generally inaugurate a consultation by advising their clients not to go to law. They know it is a very safe display of magnanimity. It is only the old story of standing on the shore to reason with a tempestuous ocean, or interfering with the appetite of a famished wolf in favour of the lamb on which he means to dine. To try to restrain a woman whose jealousy has once been aroused from any investigation of

her fancied wrongs, is no less wasted labour; and Harcourt Lowther knew quite enough of human nature to be very sure of this.

Mrs. Tredethlyn turned upon him fiercely. He had never seen the woman he loved in a passion until this moment; and though he had so much else to employ his thoughts just now, he could not help pausing for a moment to think how beautiful she looked with that new light in her eyes, that feverish glow so suddenly kindled in the cheeks that had been deadly pale.

"I will not let the matter drop," she cried. "You are keeping some hideous secret hidden from me. I know you are. I could not be mistaken in your tone just now when you saw Francis in that garden. If there were no harm in his being there, why should you express such amazement? Harcourt Lowther, we were friends once, and you affect to be my friend now. If you are what you pretend to be, tell me the meaning of my husband's conduct?"

"You love him very much, Maude, to feel his conduct so deeply."

She was too agitated to notice that her old lover had called her by her Christian name. He had perhaps been scarcely aware of it himself. He loved her better at this moment than he had ever loved her in his life, now that she stood before him a beautiful, angry, passionate creature, appealing to him against the husband for whose sake he had been jilted.

"You must be very much in love with your husband," he repeated, bitterly; "and yet I should have scarcely thought it possible you could care for that sort of person."

"He is my husband," answered Maude, "and I have a right to be angry if he does any wrong."

"I acknowledge your right to be as angry as you please, but I am sorry to see you so agitated. I am very sorry we happened to walk this way."

"Will you tell me the truth? I have appealed to you by our old friendship. I shall never again believe in you as a friend unless you speak plainly to-day."

"If you say *that*, you oblige me to speak. Will you take my arm, and walk up and down by the hedge yonder? I see people coming into the meadow, and we look rather conspicuous standing just here."

Mrs. Tredethlyn accepted the proffered arm. Harcourt Lowther was silent for some moments, while they strolled slowly under the shadow of a tall hawthorn hedge. He was waiting until Maude should have recovered some little calmness, and be in a condition to appreciate the full value of what he was going to say.

"It would be going over very old ground, and awakening very bitter recollections—on my part, at least," he began at last, in a subdued and pensive tone, "were I to tell you what I thought of your marriage with Francis Tredehlyn. When I thought of it most mildly, I believed it the maddest sacrifice that was ever made to the Moloch Wealth since this world began. You had your reasons, you told me, and they were very powerful reasons, but they were to be kept a secret. I had no more to say. All I could do was to hope that you might not be utterly miserable with the man you married—to my mind, the man of all others least adapted to make you a happy wife. I should have done well had I been wise enough to keep aloof from you and your husband after that unhappy marriage. I was so mad as to hang about your house, and accept the friendship of my rival, in the belief that I might save the vessel wherein you had embarked from some of those rocks which I saw a little ahead of the calm bay whence you sailed, with all the stereotyped paraphernalia of pennants flying and guns firing. I *have* saved you from a good deal; but I have not been able to change your husband's nature, and he has taken his own way in spite of me."

"What do you mean?" Maude demanded, breathlessly.

"I cannot, and will not, enter into the details of Francis Tredehlyn's life for the last twelve months. No, Maude, not even your entreaties shall wring from me more than I have a right to tell, or you to hear. And if I spoke the plainest words that ever sullied a woman's ear, I should only be talking a strange language which would convey no meaning to your innocent mind. There are places in London whose names you have never heard in your life—places whose very existence might never be known to honest people, if men did not write about them in the newspapers; and amongst the *habitués* of those places your husband has been conspicuous since the first week of his return from the village where you and he spent your honeymoon. There are dinners given, up at that hotel yonder, to women whose costume is an extravagant copy of yours, but who in everything except their dress differ from you as entirely as darkness differs from light; and Francis Tredehlyn has been foremost amongst the dinner-givers ever since he has had a fortune to squander. So long as he was amused by open follies and dissipations I cherished a lingering hope that custom would bring weariness, and that the very monotony of these poisonous pleasures would render them their own antidote. I made excuses for the man who had so newly succeeded to a fortune large enough to intoxicate a weak brain; and I fancied when the novelty of his wealth had ceased to bewilder him, he would awake to a ~~wiser~~ sense of the degrading path in which

he was treading. I thought this, Maude, and I believed also that your loveliness, your purity, rendered all the more obvious by contrast with the people among whom he wasted his life, must lure him back to your side. How could I think otherwise than this?—I, who had loved and lost you!"

It never occurred to Mrs. Tredethlyn that these were the very last words that Harcourt Lowther should have spoken to her, at this moment above all other moments. It seemed as if she scarcely heard this allusion to the past, any more than she had heard her old lover's frequent utterance of her Christian name.

"I think my husband loved me—once," she murmured in a low sorrowful voice. "He was so noble in his conduct—so generous to my father."

"My poor girl," exclaimed Harcourt, with supreme compassion, "how should *you* know the difference between a good man's generosity and a profligate's lavish bid for the fair young bride who happens to be the fancy of a moment? There are men who will give as exaggerated a price for a picture as ever Francis Tredethlyn offered when he won *you* for his wife; but you would scarcely call a man 'generous' because he bid extravagantly for a Raffaelle or a Murillo at Christie's. There is no creature in this world so selfish as a profligate."

Maude turned sick and cold to the very heart as Mr. Lowther said this.

A profligate! The horrible word wounded her like the stroke of a knife. In a moment this innocent girl, who until now had only known the existence of "profligacy" as an unspeakable noun substantive hidden away somewhere in the close columns of unexpurgated dictionaries, felt the veil rudely torn from the purity of her mind; and was told that her husband—the other part of herself, united to her by the solemn service of the Church—was the obnoxious thing which until this hour no one had ever dared to name in her presence. The generosity she had believed in was a sham. The noble nature which had commanded her regard and esteem, even when it could not win her love, had never existed out of her own imagination. She had been wronged, betrayed, humiliated; while in her schoolgirl simplicity she had been lamenting her unworthiness of a devoted husband's love. She had been bought for money like a slave in some Oriental market-place, when she had imagined herself a free sacrifice offered as the recompense of a sacred debt.

She did not speak; but looking at her face Harcourt Lowther saw that his words had gone home. The breach between husband and wife yawned wide enough now. The undermining of the ground had been slow, laborious work, but the result repaid this social engineer for all his trouble. With what a crash the earth fell in when it was time for the convul-

sion! So some huge mass of Kentish chalk, which sappers and miners have been manipulating for a month or so, and at which a crowd of tired spectators have been straining hopelessly for two hours at a stretch, breaks away all at once from the bosom of the cliff with a thunderous noise, and crumbles into powder.

But Mr. Lowther had not finished yet.

"I thought I could win you back to your husband, Maude, and restore him to you a better man," he said; "but I soon discovered how futile such a hope was. I have been by his side in scenes that were horribly repugnant to my own nature, in order that I might hold him back from the verge of deeper gulfs than those into which he had already fallen. Within the last few months I have known that he kept a secret from me, and I knew that it must be a disgraceful one. Only a few days ago it came to my knowledge that he had lately furnished a house somewhere in the suburbs. This gave me a clue to those mysterious absences, those journeys on business a little way out of town, about which your husband had been so reticent. Men of Francis Tredethlyn's calibre do not furnish houses from benevolent motives. I had no means of knowing where the house was,—how little could I imagine that it was in this neighbourhood, or that accident would lead our footsteps to its very threshold! Mrs. Tredethlyn, you shall not wring another word from me. I am sorry that you have tempted me to tell you so much," exclaimed Mr. Harcourt, who had said all he wanted to say—

It was a long time before Maude answered him; and then she said, very slowly, and with a painful effort—

"I thank you—for having told me the truth. **It is always best to know the truth.**"

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### CHAPTER XXXIII.

#### ROSA'S REVELATIONS.

AFTER this there was no more said between Harcourt Lowther and Mrs. Tredethlyn upon the subject of her husband's delinquencies. They walked slowly back to the stile, where Julia was sitting as quietly as if she had been that monumental Patience of whom the poet has told us. There is something wonderfully expressive in natural pantomime; and Miss Desmond, sitting on that rustic stile tracing figures from Euclid on the dusty pathway under her feet with the ivory point of her parasol, had yet contrived to keep a sharp watch upon those two people on the other side of the meadow, and to form a tolerably clear idea as to the gist of their conversation.

"Julia dear," Maude said, wearily, as they walked to the riverside, "would you mind going back to town as soon as we can get to the carriage? I have such an intolerable headache, that I'm sure I shall be quite unfit to dine with papa."

Of course Julia declared that dining in London or at the Cedars was equally indifferent to her. It was very often her humour to affect the dull characterless manner of a paid dependent; and it was her humour to do so just now.

"I am afraid Mr. Lowther and I have kept you waiting an unconscionable time," said Maude, looking at her watch.

"Not at all," replied Miss Desmond; "I rather like waiting."

Roderick Lowther and Miss Grunderson were loitering at the little landing-stage; the young lady's showy draperies pre-Raphaelite in the sharp edges which she exhibited against the hot blue sky.

"Oh, you darling Mrs. Tredethlyn!" exclaimed Rosa; "I thought you *never were* coming. If your pa is half as particular about his dinner as mine is, won't he be cross with us all! It's close upon seven o'clock!"

Maude looked piteously at Harcourt Lowther. He understood that appealing glance.

"I have given Mrs. Tredethlyn a violent headache by putting her in an awningless boat under a broiling sun," he said, "and then beguiling her into a fatiguing walk; and I deserve to be horsewhipped for my stupidity. If you have any regard for your friend's health, Miss Grunderson, you will forego the pleasure of dining with Mr. Hillary, and get her home as quietly as you can."

Rosa Grunderson might be silly, but she was by no means stupid; and, looking at Maude's ashen face, she saw that something more than a headache had caused the change in her friend. She saw this; and that vague distrust which she felt about the brother of the man she adored shaped itself into a positive dislike.

"That Mr. Lowther has been saying something to annoy her," thought Miss Grunderson; "and I hate him. What business has he to be always dancing attendance upon her instead of her husband? And now he's not content with getting her talked about, so he must needs go and make her unhappy, poor darling."

Thus mused the meditative Rosa, while Roderick Lowther rowed her homeward over the placid water. The diplomatist's fascinations were almost thrown away upon her during this brief journey from Richmond to the Cedars, although he had progressed so far in Miss Grunderson's affections during a leisurely promenade on the terrace, that he had serious thoughts of

calling on Grunderson *père* within the week to make a formal offer for the young lady's hand and fortune.

"I have no idea of wasting my time and trouble upon the girl, to find myself thrown out at the last moment by the impracticable parent," thought Roderick, as he shot through the water with that long deliberate stroke for which the Oxonians are celebrated. "I must know exactly where I am, before I devote myself to the plump Rosa. There must be no nonsense about settlements and so forth. I won't have any legal brick wall and *chevaux de frise* between me and my wife's fortune. A man doesn't quarter a cabbage with the arms of the oldest untitled family in Hampshire without getting well paid for the humiliation. I must understand what I'm going in for, when I propose to my charming Rosa."

Lionel Hillary was in the drawing-room when the water-party returned to the Cedars; but he accepted his daughter's assurance that she was too tired and too ill to dine with him, and escorted her to her carriage as soon as it was ready for her. Maude was quite composed now, and there was no suspicion of the truth aroused in the merchant's mind when he kissed her and bade her good-bye.

"It was foolish of you to go on the water in the hottest part of the day, darling," he said; "and I'm afraid you are going out a little too much in town; but the season will soon be over, and I suppose you will be leaving London."

Mrs. Tredethlyn murmured something unintelligible, and the barouche rolled away. She saw her father and the two Lowthers standing on the wide stone steps dimly through a mist, athwart which the group seemed only a confusion of familiar faces and dark garments; and then she found herself driving Londonwards through the still evening, with Julia by her side, and Rosa's anxious face opposite to her.

She accepted unquestioningly all that Harcourt Lowther had told her. Her husband was false to her. There was so much in Francis Tredethlyn's life since his marriage which seemed an evidence of his accuser's truth. And then Harcourt had not wished to accuse. The cruel revelation had been extorted from him. No trouble that Maude had ever yet endured had been so bitter as that which had come upon her to-day,—the shame, the humiliation, the unutterable horror of that discovery made in the summer sunshine, amidst the perfume of flowers, the joyous carolling of a skylark high up in the warm blue sky. She did not love her husband; and the agony which gnawed her breast during this homeward journey was the sharp pang which belongs to wounded pride rather than to betrayed affection. At least this was what she said to herself, as she remembered, with an angry flush upon her brow, those sneering ro-

marks of Mr. Lowther's about her love for such a man as Francis Tredethlyn.

"I do believe he loved me once, let Harcourt Lowther say what he will; and he was nobly generous to my father; and now he deserts me altogether, and devotes himself to some horrible woman!" thought Mrs. Tredethlyn, whose ideas were not particularly sequential this evening.

She meditated upon so much as she knew of the life that Francis had led since the close of his honeymoon. His late hours, his frequent absences, all seemed to confirm Harcourt's account of dissipated habits and degraded tastes.

Yes, everything combined to prove the miserable truth. She was a neglected wife; abandoned by the man who had once seemed the veriest slave that ever bowed beneath the supreme dominion of Love. She remembered what he had been, or what she had believed him to be, and was all the more indignant with him for the discoveries of to-day. Rosa Grunderson, anxiously watching Mrs. Tredethlyn in the twilight, wondered that so dark a cloud could overshadow the fair face of her friend.

"It must be something very dreadful," thought Rosa; "but whatever it is, that Mr. Lowther is at the bottom of it. If Roderick does propose,—which I've every reason to think he will, from the way he conducted himself on the terrace,—and he and pa can come to any arrangement about me, I won't have much to do with my brother-in-law, that's certain, for I hate him. But I dare say those horrid ground-rents will always stand in the way of my being married to anybody but a Rothschild; and Rothschilds don't trouble *themselves* about ground-rents."

The drive from Twickenham to Stuccoville is not a very long one; and Mrs. Tredethlyn's bays got over the ground at a pace that did credit to the judgment of Mr. Lowther, who had chosen the horses for his friend. It was nearly nine o'clock when the barouche drew up before the Doric colonnade which imparted a funeral darkness to Maude's dining-room; and before the three ladies could alight, a hansom cab dashed up to the kerbstone, a pair of slamming doors were flung open, and Francis Tredethlyn sprang out upon the pavement.

His wife's face flushed crimson, and then grew deadly pale. She turned to Rosa Grunderson, and murmured in faint, broken accents: "Will you dine with us, Rosa? or shall Martin drive you home?"

"Thank you, darling," Miss Grunderson answered promptly; "I think I'll come in for just a few moments. Pa will have gone to the Bell and—to his club by this time," added Rosa, whose parent was wont to spend his evenings in the parlour of a very respectable tavern in the Brompton Road, where he and

several other worthies assembled nightly to discuss the affairs of the nation amidst the fumes of their cigars, the primitive clay being strictly tabooed in that select little coterie.

Maude alighted and entered the hall. Francis had handed her from the carriage, and followed her into the house. He threw away his cigar as he stepped into the hall, and approached his wife radiant with good spirits and perfumed with tobacco.

"I'm so glad you've come home," he said. "I thought you were going to dine with the governor, and that I should have to sit in that dreary room all by myself, with only Landseer's stag-hounds to keep me company; though if half the people one calls company were as much alive as *they* are, a dinner-party wouldn't be such a dismal business as it is. Of course you haven't dined; no more have I; and unfortunately there doesn't seem to be any dinner," added Mr. Tredethlyn, as he opened the door and looked into the dining-room, where the table was blank and ghastly under a faint glimmer of gas. "No one was expected, I suppose? However, they can get us something. Geffreys, just see about dinner, will you? How do you do, Miss Grunderson? I dare say you're hungry after your drive. Are you going up-stairs, Maude?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Tredethlyn. The syllable had a startling effect as it fell from her lips, like one solitary drop of hail falling suddenly on a summer day.

"I am going up-stairs," said Miss Desmond confidentially to Rosa; "will you come with me, and take off your things?"

"No, thanks, dear," answered Miss Grunderson, who would have endured tortures rather than say "thank you," when fashion required that she should say "thanks." "I don't think I *will* take off my things. Mrs. Tredethlyn doesn't seem very well; and it's almost too late for dinner; so I think I'll just go up to the morning-room, and rest for a few minutes before I go home. The carriage needn't be kept, you know, please," added Miss Grunderson, to a male domestic hovering in the shadowy depths of the hall; "for I can have a cab fetched when I want to go."

Mr. Tredethlyn had followed his wife to the drawing-room; and the two girls standing at the foot of the staircase heard one of the doors close with a sonorous bang.

Miss Desmond went up-stairs, and Miss Grunderson followed slowly. The morning-room of which Rosa had spoken was on the second floor; but the young lady did not go any farther than the first landing-place. The door of the front drawing-room was closed, but the doors of the back drawing-room stood wide open; and peering into the lighted apartment, Rosa saw that it was quite empty. She paused for a moment, looked about her; and then went quietly into the back drawing-room, and closed the door very softly behind her.

Francis Tredethlyn followed his wife to the drawing-room because that one frozen syllable, together with the strange expression of her face, had been quite enough to tell him that something was wrong. This husband and this wife had never quarrelled. There had been between them none of those little stormy passages which are apt to interrupt the serenity of the best-regulated households; and the Cornishman's heart turned cold with the thought that anything like ill-feeling could arise between himself and Maude. The altered expression of her face boded so much; and yet what could arise to displease her, when he was nothing but her devoted slave, ready to obey her commands, willing to lay down his very life for her pleasure?"

"Maude," he said, as he closed the drawing-room door, "you speak to me and look at me as if you were offended. And yet I have no consciousness of having done anything to displease you."

Mrs. Tredethlyn looked at her husband with supreme contempt; not the cool scorn which is akin to indifference, but rather a passionate disdainfulness. Taking into consideration the fact that Maude did not care for her husband, all this semi-nine rage seemed a sad waste of feeling.

"Do not add hypocrisy to the wrong you have done me," said Mrs. Tredethlyn. "I have been most cruelly awakened this day to a knowledge of the life you have been leading—ever since our marriage. I cannot speak of this subject; it is too horrible; I think the words would choke me. I thought that I should have been able to write what I had to tell you; but since I have been so unfortunate as to meet you, I may as well say with my own lips what I meant to have said in a letter. It is very little. I have only to tell you that from this moment we must be strangers to each other. After my discoveries of to-day, I should consider myself a base and degraded creature if I ever suffered your hand to touch mine in friendship again. The obligation of my father's debt to you must rest upon him henceforward, and not upon me."

"But, Maude, explain yourself!—your discovery of to-day, you say! What discovery?"

"Your affectation of unconsciousness is a deeper insult than yours—No, I will not discuss this subject with you!" cried Maude, passionately. "It is shameful—it is cruel—that I should have been wronged so basely, when I trusted you so completely. Do not speak to me; do not touch me!" she exclaimed, shrinking away from him with a shudder; "your presence inspires me with disgust and abhorrence. Why do you make any poor pretence of inhabiting this house, which has only afforded you an ostensible shelter, while your amusements and your friends have been found elsewhere? I set you free from this hour, Mr.

Tredethlyn. Seek for happiness after your own fashion; where you please. I have nothing more to say to you."

She swept from the room before her husband could arrest her. Unspeakably bewildered by her passionate words, which were almost meaningless to him, Francis Tredethlyn stood motionless as a statue a few paces from the doorway by which his wife had just left him. He was standing thus when the voluminous curtains which were drawn across the archway between the drawing-rooms were cautiously divided, and a plump little figure in blue muslin appeared among the amber drapery. The Cornishman heard the rustling, and turned abruptly towards the *portière*.

"Yes," exclaimed Miss Grunderson, "it's me; no, it's I!—but, goodness gracious, what *does* it matter about grammar, when there's so much trouble in the world?—yes, and I've been listening," continued the young lady, answering Mr. Tredethlyn's inquiring stare; "and I know that listening in a general way is considered mean; but I think the amount of pa's ground-rents ought to exempt me from any imputation of meanness. If I didn't love that sweet lamb so dearly; and if I hadn't a very sincere regard for you, Mr. Tredethlyn,—having come into money suddenly myself, and knowing how trying it is to carry it off carelessly, and not look as if one was always conscious of being richer than other people;—if I didn't—in short, I shouldn't have stopped behind those curtains,—and run the risk of being considered a sneak and a listener. But do say that you forgive me, please, and believe that I meant it for the best?" pleaded Rosa, whose diction was apt to become rather obscure under the influence of excitement.

"What, in Heaven's name, does it all mean, Miss Grunderson?" asked Francis, piteously.

He was ready to cling to the frailest spar by which he might float on the wide ocean of perplexity, whose billows had so suddenly encompassed him.

"Goodness gracious knows—I don't any more than the dead though if there *is* anything in drawing-room tables balancing themselves on tip-toe and great-coats flying about the room like awkward birds the dead may know more than we give them credit for," exclaimed the lively Rosa, without a single stop; "but it's very certain there is something wrong, and whatever it is, that Mr. Lowther is at the bottom of it."

"Harcourt Lowther?"

"Yes. My pa hears a great deal of gossip at the Bell and—at clubs, and such places; and he always tells me everything he hears. And oh, Mr. Tredethlyn, if you knew how long I have wished to speak my mind to you, I am sure you would forgive me for listening just now."

"My dear Miss Grunderson, what could you have to say to me?" asked the bewildered Cornishman.

"Oh, lots of things. But then you know the grand maxim in society is that you *mustn't* speak your mind. It's like that Latin person's rule of *nil thingamy*; you *mustn't* admire any thing, you know; and so on. And one must unlearn all one's Catechism, about loving one's neighbour as oneself, and doing unto others as one would they should—which always reminds me of a winter Sunday afternoon at school and broken chil-blains, because one *did* break once while I was saying it. And you see in society the thing is to let your neighbour go his way and to go yours, and to say, 'Bless my soul! exactly as I anticipated; paw creatchaw!' if your neighbour tumbles over a precipice, from which it would be the very worst of bad manners to hold him back; and in society, if you saw the good Samaritan—no, the other person—lying wounded in the road, it would be a dreadful *incon*—what it's name?—to pick him up and take him to an inn and pay for his lodging, because he might call you to account for your impertinent officiousness as soon as he got well. So, though I have been bursting to speak my mind almost ever since I've known you, Mr. Tredethlyn, I've held my tongue until to-night. But to-night the climax has come, and I *must* speak. Oh, you poor dear thing!" cried Rosa, in a sudden outburst of sympathy, "how you and your wife *have* been talked about!"

"Talked about!—by whom, when, and where?"

"By everybody, always, everywhere. You don't know—though you ought to know, if you ever listened to what was going on around you—how people *do* talk. They've talked about your dissipation, the hours you have kept, the places you have been seen at, the people you have been seen with; about your coming home in hansom cabs in the middle of the night; and I think if quieter vehicles could be invented for people who stay out late, or at least the doors made to open differently, there wouldn't *be* so much scandal. They've talked about your getting *tipsy*," exclaimed Rosa, shaking her head solemnly, and laying a tremendous stress upon the obnoxious word; "and they've said you were drinking yourself into an early grave, and that Harcourt Lowther was leading you on to your death in order that he might marry your wife afterwards."

"Harcourt lead me—to my death—and—marry Maude! Oh, no, no, no; it is too horrible!" gasped Francis, staring at Miss Grunderson, with his head clasped in his hands, and big beads of perspiration upon his brow.

"I know it is," answered Rosa; "but they say it; and you *must* own it was not a wise thing for you to be so very intimate

with a man who was engaged to your wife before you married her."

"Engaged to my wife! Who was engaged to my wife?"

"Why, Harcourt Lowther, of course! Didn't you know all about it?"

"No, so help me Heaven!"

Miss Grunderson looked very grave. All that she had said had been spoken in perfect good faith; but, all at once, she began to see that mischief might come of this free utterance of her thoughts.

"I thought that you knew it," she stammered in considerable confusion, "or I'm sure I should never have said one word about—"

"How did you come to know it?" asked Francis, turning fiercely upon the terrified Rosa.

"Miss Desmond told me."

"It is a lie, a malicious lie, invented by Julia Desmond!"

"I dare say it is something in the way of a story," responded Miss Grunderson, who was very anxious to extinguish the sudden conflagration which her unconscious hand had fired; "people do tell such stories, you know; not that I think Miss Desmond would speak so positively unless—but I'm sure if Mrs. Tredethlyn *was* ever engaged to Mr. Lowther, she had quite forgotten him when she married you; only if it was so, I don't think it was quite honourable of him to be so friendly with you without telling you all about it."

Thus Miss Grunderson—floundering helplessly in a conversational quagmire—endeavoured to undo any mischief which her indiscretion might have made. But Francis was not listening to her; he was thinking of all his life during the last year, and a host of trifling circumstances recurred to his mind, in evidence against the wife he had loved, and the friend he had trusted.

"Yes," he thought, as he sank moodily down into the nearest chair, and covered his face with his hands, as heedless of Miss Grunderson's presence as if that young lady had been one of her father's cabbages,—"yes, it is no lie of Julia Desmond's. A hundred recollections arise in my mind to bear witness to its truth. Maude's confession about the some one whom she had loved, but whose poverty was a hindrance to a marriage with her. Harcourt Lowther's letters from that beautiful heiress, whose father's wealth stood between him and happiness. I knew that they had known each other before he sailed for Van Diemen's Land; but I believed him implicitly when he told me casually one day that they had never been more than the most indifferent acquaintances. He had a careless, half-contemptu-

ous way of talking of my wife that galled me to the quick, and that I have sometimes resented. Fool and dupe that I was! That affected cynicism, that pretended indifference, was only a part of his scheme. He loved her all the time; and while with one hand he pushed me away from her into the drunken orgies that only kill a little more slowly than the secret doses of the assassin, with the other he held fast the chain that bound him to her; waiting till he should be able to say, ‘ You are free, and I claim the fulfilment of your broken promise. You are enriched by the death of the poor dupe who loved you, and poverty need separate us no longer.’ Oh, God of Heaven, what a fool I have been! and how clearly I can see my folly, now when it is too late! False wife, false friend! so deeply, fondly loved, so blindly trusted. I can remember my wife’s face the day she spoke to me of Harcourt Lowther. Has she been in the base plot against me? No, I will not believe it. If I have been this man’s blind dupe, his helpless tool, she may have been as blind, as helpless as myself. O God, give me strength to trust her still, for my heart must break if she is base and cruel.”

A man’s ideas are not apt to arrange themselves very consecutively at such a time; but it was something after this fashion that Francis Tredethlyn reflected upon his friend’s treachery, while Rosa stood by watching him very anxiously, with that fiery eagerness which had prompted her to speak her mind considerably cooled down by the aspect of her companion’s distress.

“ Miss Grunderson,” said Francis presently, “ whatever the world may have said against Harcourt Lowther, it is a false and lying world if it ever slandered the goodness and purity of my wife.”

“ I know that,” answered Rosa, becoming energetic once more; “ for of all the sweet darlings that ever were, she’s the sweetest and the dearest. And how should *she* know that people made nasty disagreeable remarks about Mr. Lowther’s always happening to go to the parties she went to and calling here oftener than other people, and so on—”

“ He went to parties!” cried Francis. “ He told me that he hated parties; that he scarcely went anywhere.”

“ Ah, but he did, though; and it has been his flirting way—not the things he has said, you know, but his way of saying them—his *ompressmong*, you know, that has caused those ill-natured remarks about Mrs. Tredethlyn. Nothing sets people talking like *ompressmong*.”

Francis did not answer. Little by little the mists cleared away from his mental vision; and he saw that Harcourt Lowther had been from first to last the subtlest schemer who ever plotted the ruin of an honest blockhead. It had needed only

Miss Grunderson's feminine guesswork to let sudden light into the cavernous depths of the foulest pitfall that ever treachery dug under the ignorant footsteps of its victim. Francis remembered all the bitter ridicule, the sneering compassion, that Harcourt Lowther had heaped upon the respectable world, from which he held his dupe aloof, while he plunged him to the very lips in the dissipations of Bohemia. By this means he had effected as complete a separation between the husband and wife as if the same roof had ceased to shelter them.

"I have thought—when my tempter gave me time to think—that it was Maude's coldness alone which separated us; but I know now that it was the schemer's work from first to last. She did not love me,—O Heaven, have pity upon my poor tortured heart!—she loved him, perhaps: but I might have had some little chance of winning her love if I had remained at her feet—her slave, her worshipper; but he has held me away from her, and now she abhors me. She has no feeling but disgust and disdain for the wretch who has abandoned her to waste his days on a racecourse, his nights in the drunken orgies of a gaming-house."

Francis Tredethlyn sat with his face hidden in his hands, thinking of his folly, and hating himself for it. Why had he given himself up body and soul into the power of Harcourt Lowther? why had he been so poor a dupe in the toils of this man? It was not that he had entertained any special regard for the gentleman who had pretended to be his friend. In Van Diemen's Land he had often had good reason to despise the peevish grumbler, the selfish Sybarite; and yet for the last year he had taken the man's dictum upon every subject, even upon that one vital question on which the happiness of his life depended. Why had he trusted so blindly; why had he submitted so slavishly to follow the guiding-strings that led him into places where he found no pleasure, amongst people who inspired him with disgust?

Little by little the answers to these questions shaped themselves in Francis Tredethlyn's mind; and he saw that his uncle Oliver's hoarded wealth had been at the root of all his misery. The wealth which had lifted him suddenly into a world that was strange to him; the wealth which had made him the mark for every schemer; the wealth which had won him the hand of the woman whose heart could never have been won by his true and honest love. Adrift in that strange world, the man who had kept his name unsullied, his soul untainted, his head erect before the faces of his fellow-men, while his pockets were empty, and his very existence dependent upon the day's work that earned him a day's food, found himself all at once the most helpless creature that had ever floated at the mercy of the winds.

and waves upon a trackless ocean; and he had been very glad to grasp the first rope that was thrown out to him in all friendly seeming to guide him safely to the shore. His ignorance had flung him, unarmed and powerless, into Harcourt Lowther's arms; and the man to whom he had felt himself superior while blacking his boots and obeying his orders out in Van Diemen's Land became all at once, indeed, the master, free to work his own will with that most helpless of all creatures, an uneducated millionaire.

"If I had a son," thought Francis Tredethlyn,—and a faint thrill was stirred in his breast by the mere hypothesis,—"I should send him to school before I turned him out into the world. Yet I, who am as ignorant as a baby of the world in which I live, have plunged recklessly into its vortex, expecting to emerge unhurt. My own folly is the cause of my destruction. And yet I might have met with an honest friend; I might have had a loving wife."

"A loving wife!" Ah, how the poor faithful heart ached as Francis thought this! A man's fireside is the same peaceful sanctuary, whether the hearth is gorgeous with encaustic tiles and an Axminster rug, or poorly covered with a scrap of faded Kidderminster, in some humble chamber where the firelight glimmers on the delf platters that adorn a cottage-dresser.

"If Maude had loved me," Francis argued, brooding moodily upon his wrongs, "my money need have brought me no misery; my ignorance would have beguiled me into no danger. Her voice would have regulated my life; her counsel would have prompted every action. Her smallest wish would have been my law. And it would have been very hard if the companionship of a lady had not in time transformed me into a gentleman. But what are the people with whom I have herded since my marriage—the acquaintances whom Harcourt Lowther has chosen for me? What! pshaw! why do I stop to think of all this? She never loved me. I should have tried to win her love if he had left me to do so. I might have failed even then as miserably as I have failed now."

He groaned aloud as he thought this, and startled Miss Grunderson, who was sitting at a respectful distance from him folding and unfolding her parasol, and wondering why she had got into this *galère*, and how she was to get out of it; and registering a mental vow that she would never again be tempted by her recollection of her duty to her neighbour to depart from the manners and customs of polite society. But to her relief Francis looked up presently, and addressed her.

"I thank you heartily for having spoken so frankly to me," he said; "it is only right that I should be acquainted with the common talk about the man whose hand I have clasped in friend."

ship almost every day for the last twelve months. But I hope you will believe that, whatever Mr. Lowther may or may not be, my wife is good and pure, and worthy of the warmest affection you can feel for her. Your warmth of feeling has touched me deeply, Miss Grunderson. I have been living in so false an atmosphere lately, that I must be dull indeed if I were not affected by your friendly candour. If—if anything should happen to separate Maude and me, I should be very glad to think she had such a friend as you. And—if ever you saw her trusting, as I have trusted, in the truth and honour of Harcourt Lowther, you would stand between her and that dangerous adviser, that false friend—would you not, Miss Grunderson?"

"I would," answered Rosa, valiantly; "I should speak my mind to her and to Mr. Lowther into the bargain, as candidly as I have spoken it to you to-night."

"I believe you would," said Francis. "And now, my dear, God bless you, and good night!"

He held out both his hands and clasped Rosa's pudgy little paws in a brief grasp, and then strode past her on his way towards the door.

"You're not going out to-night, are you, Mr. Tredehlyn?" she asked anxiously; "it is so *very* late."

Poor little Rosa was rather alarmed by that resolute stride towards the door, which might only be the first step in some ghastly vengeance to be taken upon Harcourt Lowther by the stalwart Cornishman.

"I shouldn't like to have his blood upon my head, though I do hate and detest him," thought Miss Grunderson; "for in these days of spirit-rapping there's no knowing how he might spite himself upon me. I might have him tilting and tip-toeing every table I ever sat down to."

"I'm only going to my room to write a letter," answered Mr. Tredehlyn; "shall I order my wife's carriage for you?"

"No, thank you; as our house is so near, I think I'll ask one of your servants to see me home," replied Rosa, who had no idea of leaving the ground just yet. "I'll run up to Mrs. Tredehlyn's room and say good-bye. Shall I take her any message from you?"

"None, thank you; good night."

"Good night."

Rosa left him still standing in the drawing-room. The spacious and grandiose apartment, in all of whose costly adornment—from the pictures on the walls to the Louis-Seize snuff-boxes and lapis-lazuli *bonbonnières*, and all the expensive fripperies so lavishly scattered on the tables—there was no single object which had been chosen with any reference to his taste, with any thought of his comfort or pleasure. No exquisite joy,

of "picking-up;" no delicious bargaining with dirty brokers in the purlieus of Holborn; no evening excursions, treasure-hunting, among dingy by-ways, where remnants of choice old china lurk sometimes, unrecognized and unvalued, amongst the rubbish in a dimly-lighted shop-window; none of the pleasant struggles, the proud triumphs, which attend the collection of Poverty's art and *virtu*, had attended the decoration of this splendid chamber. The Cornishman had given *carte blanche* to his friend, and had written cheques—whose figures he had not remembered five minutes after writing them—in favour of a celebrated dealer in Bond Street, and an upholsterer in Oxford Street; and that was all. He smiled bitterly now as he paused to look round the room before he left it—perhaps for ever.

"And this has been my home," he thought. "Home! Better to sit by my uncle Oliver's miserly fire, in the dreary house on the Cornish moors, than to loll in one of those yellow-satin chairs, playing at ball with a gold snuff-box, and watching the traitor whom I have trusted talking to my wife."

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## CHAPTER XXXIV.

## THE LADY AT PETERSHAM.

THE letter which Francis Tredethlyn wrote in his study was a long one; a very painful one to write, as it seemed, from the face of the writer, and the weary sigh which every now and then escaped from his lips, as his hurrying pen paused for a moment. It was close upon ten o'clock when he began the letter. The clock chimed the half-hour after eleven while he was sealing it. He addressed the envelope, and then threw himself back in his chair to think. He had so much to think of. Maude's extraordinary conduct, Rosa Grunderson's revelation, had overthrown the whole fabric of his life; and he found himself surrounded by ruins whose utter chaos he could not contemplate without bewilderment.

For the last few weeks his thoughts had been almost exclusively devoted to his cousin Susan, and her wrongs. Found at last, after so many failures and disappointments, so much delay, the lonely girl had been welcomed as tenderly as any wanderer who ever returned to the lost friends of his youth. But Susan Lesley had a sad story to tell her cousin. The missing link in the chain that Francis Tredethlyn had put together piece by piece was the letter which had been written from St. Petersburg by the man whom Susan had loved and trusted—the man whose diary had revealed to Francis the utter worthlessness of his character.

Robert Lesley's letter was only a worthy companion to

Robert Lesley's diary. In it he coldly and deliberately told the girl who loved him, that she was not his wife; that the Marylebone marriage was no marriage; the registrar no recognized official, but a scoundrel hired for a twenty-pound note to play the part of that functionary; that the registrar's office had been no office, but a lodging-house parlour hired for the occasion, and half-a-dozen doors from the real office. This statement was, of course, accompanied by the usual heartless sophistries which run so glibly from the pen, or fall so smoothly from the lips, of an utterly heartless man. The self-confessed betrayer pleaded the madness of an all-absorbing love; the stern necessities of well-bred poverty; the pressure of family circumstances; the fear of a father's rage; and then, in conclusion, the writer stated the pitiful stipend which he was prepared to offer to the woman he had abandoned, and the child he had disowned.

Susan showed her cousin this letter, and told him how, after receiving it, her mind had almost given way under the burden of her great agony. Then it was that she had gone to Mrs. Burfield, and had written to her father a long letter, telling him something of her story, but not all; appealing piteously to the only friend to whom she could appeal; for faithful Frank was far away in some unknown country. She told her cousin how she had waited, at first with a faint sickly hope, then with a blank despair, for some answer from the father to whom she had appealed. But none came; and when her little stock of money had sunk to its lowest ebb, she left the dull quiet of Coltonslough to begin a weary, lonely struggle for bread, which had endured, without one ray of sunlight to illumine its blank misery, until the summer Sunday afternoon on which Francis Tredeithlyn found her sitting in the nurse's cottage with her boy in her arms.

It was so sad a story, and so sadly common, that there is little need to dwell upon the unvarnished record of a woman's battle with poverty in the heart of a great city.

"Perhaps I ought to think myself very happy, Francis," Susan said when she had told her story; "for I was always able to pay the nurse somehow for her care of my darling; and the deadly fear of not being able to do *that* was the worst trouble I knew in all that dreary time. I have been face to face with starvation, Frank, very often within the last two years but it is not so terrible, when one is used to it. The help always came at last, and some friendly hand, so unexpected that it might have dropped down from heaven, has often come between me and despair. I have sometimes thought that bitter struggle for my daily bread was only a blessing in disguise, for it kept me from brooding upon my great sorrow; it some-

times shut from me the thought of Robert's cruelty and my own disgrace."

"Disgrace!" cried the Cornishman; "no, Susan, there is no shadow of disgrace upon you except the disgrace of being united to a scoundrel and a liar. The marriage before the registrar was a *bonâ fide* marriage, as binding as if it had been performed by the Archbishop of Canterbury."

And then Francis told Susan of his visit to the registrar's office. This was the balm which he was able to pour into the deepest wound that ever tortured a woman's heart. But the identity of the husband who had lied in denouncing himself a liar was entirely unknown to Susan. In all the familiar intercourse of the brief period in which the trusting girl had been a petted and happy wife, Robert Lesley had not let fall one careless word relating in the remotest way to his position in life, his family, or his prospects. When first consulted by Francis upon the contents of the diary, Messrs. Kursdale and Scardon had instituted an inquiry as to whether a Mr. Robert Lesley had been inscribed on the books of St. Boniface any time between 1845 and 1852; and the answer had been in the negative. No person of the name had been a member of that college within the last ten years. Francis could only conclude, therefore, that Mrs. Burfield had been right in her supposition that the man calling himself Robert Lesley had shielded his identity under a false name.

"But your husband was visited by his brother, was he not, Susan?" said Mr. Tredethlyn, when this subject was discussed between the cousins.

"Yes; but I knew no more of Robert's brother than of Robert himself. He did not come to us often. I heard that he was a lawyer,—a barrister, I think,—and that he lived in the Temple. I heard even that by accident, and Robert seemed almost vexed that I should know so much."

All these trifling circumstances seemed to point inevitably to one conclusion; Robert Lesley had intended from the first to abandon his wife, whenever his own interests rendered it advisable that he should throw off the tie that bound him to her. Love and selfishness go very badly hand-in-hand together; and love had soon left selfishness sole master of the field.

"But this man shall be made to acknowledge his wife,—to give a name to his child," cried Francis, "if he can be found."

If he could be found: that was the grand question. But Mr. Tredethlyn was quite at a loss with regard to the means by which his cousin's husband was to be found. In this case even the grand medium by which the lost are restored to the arms of their friends—the second column of the "Times"—could be of

no avail; for what is the use of advertising for a man who does not want to reveal himself?

"If my husband is alive, Providence may throw him across my path some day," Susan said, resignedly. "He could not be more dead to me than he is now if he were buried in the deepest grave that ever held the ashes of the lost; but if he gave my boy the name that is his right, I think I could forgive him all the wrong he has done me."

It was quite in vain that Francis Tredethlyn sought to carry his cousin and her son home to his own house. The sorrowful young mother shrank with absolute terror from the idea of encountering strangers, of finding herself in a splendid house amongst happy people.

"I am used to my poverty, Francis," she said;—"let me be poor still. Nobody is inquisitive about me, because I am beneath people's curiosity. No one questions me about the husband who has deserted me, or extorts my story from me only to doubt it when it is told. My father would not believe me; can I expect strangers to be more trusting than he was? No, Francis; leave me alone in my obscurity. I have a lodging near here, and I can see my darling every day. I will freely accept from you a little income which will enable me to live as I have lived, without working as hard as I have worked; but I will accept no more. I am delighted to think that my father left his fortune to you, Frank; and I thank and bless you for having taken so much trouble to find me out."

Francis Tredethlyn found it hard work to win Susan away from this determination, so quietly expressed. But he did at last persuade her to agree to his own plans for her life, on condition that he should tell Maude nothing, nor ask Susan to meet her until the missing husband was found, and compelled to acknowledge his wife and son. Francis consented to promise this; but he cherished a hope that Susan would relent by-and-by, when she heard more of Maude's tender and amiable nature, and that he would be able to win his wife's friendship for the simple country girl who had played with him amongst the daisies in Landresdale churchyard.

"You must accept the home I shall prepare for you, Susy," said Francis, "or I will have a deed of gift drawn up to-morrow, transferring half my fortune to you. I am ready to divide your father's wealth with you as soon as ever I understand your legal position. In the meantime let me have the sweetest pleasure my money has ever given me yet—the pleasure of making a happy home for you and my little kinsman. If you knew how I have wasted that hoarded money, Susy, on racecourses, and all kinds of worthless places," added Mr. Tredethlyn, with a remorseful recollection of one particular brand of Moselle, for

which he had been wont to pay fourteen shillings a bottle in the purlieus of the Haymarket.

Susan consented to let her cousin do what he liked with regard to the place in which she was to live henceforward. What mother could refuse a bright home for the child she loves? A few words from Francis conjured up the vision of a garden, where the boy could play under the shadow of lilacs and laburnums; where the summer breeze would waft the petals of overblown roses around that golden head. From the happy moment in which he urged the child's welfare as an argument against the mother, Francis Tredethlyn's triumph was secured. Susan pondered. She thought of the sweet country air, the bright rooms, with the fresh breath of morning blowing in at the open windows, the garden, the cow, the chickens, and all the joys of that sweet rustic paradise which town-bred children hear of from their mother's lips, and see only in their dreams. Susan hesitated. Francis had made friends with the boy by this time, and had enlisted the child on his side of the argument. When the woman's sorrowful pride began to hold out weakly, when the mother's heart showed symptoms of relenting, the child's little chubby arms crept round her neck, and the child's tiny voice pleaded in her ear:

"Peese, mammy, do live in the pooty house, and let Wobert have pooty flowers."

It was the triumph of infantine oratory. Susan turned to her kinsman, half laughing, half crying, and gave him her hand.

"You must do as you like, cousin Frank," she said. "Whatever is best for Robert must be best for me."

Thus it was that Francis Tredethlyn had withdrawn himself in a great measure from the society of Mr. Lowther, while he scoured the prettiest suburbs in search of a home for his cousin, and superintended the necessary improvements and decoration, the selection of the simple furniture, the arrangement of a garden, in which Robert Lesley's son might play happily, his life undarkened by the baseness of an unknown father. There had been unspeakable pleasure for the Cornishman in the doing of this work. It was so long since he had been of use to any one; it was so long since his supremest benevolence to his fellow-men had taken any higher form than the payment of a dinner-bill, and a handsome bonus to the waiter. He seemed to breathe a new atmosphere, a fresher, purer air, when he shook himself clear of Harcourt Lowther's society, and spent a summer's day pottering amongst carpenters and house-painters in the Petersham cottage. The odour of turpentine and lead did not give him a headache; it was almost invigorating after

the stifling fumes of musk and mock-turtle, patchouli, and devilled whitebait that had pervaded the hotel dining-rooms in which he had so often acted as host. Energetic though Mr. Tredethlyn was in the carrying out of his arrangements, Susan had been established little more than a week at the cottage, and the paint on the Venetian shutters was still rather sticky, when Harcourt Lowther found the upholsterer's bill, which gave him the clue to his pupil's mysterious conduct. To hasten down to Petersham, find the cottage, refresh himself with dry sherry and soda-water at the nearest tavern, and to make himself agreeably familiar with the landlord of the tavern, was all incomparably easy to Mr. Lowther. From the landlord he heard all about Brook Cottage. How it had been to let for nearly a twelve-month; how it had been taken all in a hurry at the end of May by a dashing-looking gentleman from town, who had been reported scouring the neighbourhood in hansom cabs, inquiring for houses to let, for three days at a stretch; how painters and glaziers, carpenters and gardeners, had set to work in hot haste to renew and revivify everything in-doors and out; how waggon-loads of the finest gravel from Wimbledon, and cart-loads of the softest turf from Ham, had been laid down in the garden; how furniture, that was every bit of it new, had been brought down from London; how the tall, dashing, energetic gentleman in the hansom cab had been perpetually on the ground with his officious finger for ever in the pie; and how larger cans of half-and-half had been consumed by the workmen at the cost of the dashing gentleman than the landlord of the Prince's Feathers remembers to have chalked up against any one customer since he had traded as a licensed victualler.

All this Mr. Lowther was told; and beyond this, he heard how a lady, very pretty and quite young, but a little pale and worn-looking, had arrived at last to take possession of "the prettiest little box that was ever put together, without regard to expense;" how she was attended by an elderly female in black, who had evidently seen better days, and who acted as nurse to a little boy; how two respectable young women had been hired in the neighbourhood, to act as cook and housemaid; and how, coming regularly to the Feathers in quest of the kitchen-beer, they had already reported their mistress as the sweetest and pleasantest of ladies, and first-cousin to the dashing gentleman in the hansom cab. The landlord tried to look as if he had no uncharitable thoughts about this cousinship; but Harcourt Lowther saw that Francis Tredethlyn and the lady had been subjects of grave scandal in that quiet country place. He heard that the dashing gentleman had been at Petersham almost every day for the last week; and that he and the lady passed the greater part of their time in the garden, where they might be

seen at any time from the high-road,—the gentleman smoking and playing with a little boy, and the lady working, at a rustic table, under a mulberry-tree. A pot-boy, coming in from his rounds, as Harcourt lounged at the bar, confirmed the landlord's statement when appealed to. He had passed Brook Cottage not five minutes before, and had seen the lady and gentleman talking to a gardener, who was doing something to a rose-tree.

"She's a rare one for flowers, the lady is," the potman said, in conclusion.

A rare one for flowers: Harcourt Lowther mused gravely upon this remark.

The fair denizens of Bohemia, to whom he had introduced Francis, were not generally devoted to floriculture in cottage-gardens, though they were greedy of gigantic bouquets, to rest on the velvet cushions of their opera-boxes, or the front seats of their carriages, when they drove to race meetings. Who was this pale, worn-looking young woman, who called Francis cousin? Was she really his cousin, that Cornish girl of whom the soldier had told his master in Van Diemen's Land, and whose miserably-executed likeness had reminded Harcourt of another face, whose owner had played some part in the experience of his life? Was this inhabitant of the newly-furnished cottage really the Cornish cousin? Mr. Lowther could scarcely imagine that it was so; for, in that case, why should Francis have kept her existence a secret from his *fidus Achates* in the person of Harcourt himself?

"Secrecy is only another name for guilt," thought Mr. Lowther. "Our friend has gone to the bad in real earnest this time, and I can make a *coup*. I was getting very tired of the slow game."

Armed with this information, the schemer went back to town, to take his place in Maude's opera-box, and to lead up to that idea of a morning at the Cedars, which seemed to originate in Mrs. Tredethlyn's own brain. Chance, which had been against him so long, had gone with him unfailingly in this business. The lucky moment had come; he had got his lead at last, and had only to play his winning cards. Chance had been constant to the schemer even in that interview between Francis and Rosa; for it had happened that, in all Miss Grunderson's candid outpourings, she had not dropped a word about Mrs. Tredethlyn's stroll in the Petersham meadows; though, even if she had done so, the Cornishman might have been very slow to perceive that an accidental glimpse of himself and gentle Susy, in friendly companionship, could have been the primary cause of that stormy greeting which he had received at the hands of his wife. Francis accepted his wife's passionate outburst as only

the climax of the disgust and weariness with which he had inspired her.

"She reproaches me for the life I have been leading lately," he said bitterly; "but she does not understand her own feelings. It is not my life, but me she hates. It is myself that inspires the loathing and contempt which she talked of, and not my late hours or my gambling and horse-racing."

After sitting for some time plunged in a gloomy reverie, in the dreary library, where the backs of the books he never opened seemed to frown upon him in their sombre Russia leather brownness, Francis stirred as the little black marble clock on the mantel-piece chimed the quarter after twelve, and felt in his waistcoat-pocket for a note which he had found waiting for him on his table the previous night. It was a tiny twisted *poulet* from Harcourt Lowther:—

"DEAR FRANK,—A line to remind you of to-morrow night. You will be expected any time after nine.—Yours always,

"H. L."

This reminder referred to a bachelor's supper which Mr. Lowther had arranged at his lodgings; a party at which there was to be what the host called a quiet rubber. A rubber played with that deadly quiet which attends the science of whist when heavy amounts tremble in the balance, and a sum that a poor man would call a fortune may depend on the player's judicious choice between a five and a seven. Such a rubber as that which the well-known Sir Robert was once concluding, when, just as he pondered over his two last cards, a thoughtless looker-on happened to break the solemn silence by one luckless word, and lo, the chain of scientific reasoning dropped to pieces,—the popular statesman played the wrong card, and lost a thousand pounds. It was not often that Harcourt Lowther entertained his friends; but when Francis lapsed into a temporary stagnation, the master was apt to keep his pupil going on the road to ruin by such an entertainment as this. The quiet rubber at Mr. Lowther's lodgings generally led to other rubbers elsewhere, or cursory appointments for Liverpool or Newmarket, or Chester or Northampton, or a dinner at Richmond, gaily cut for at blind hookey while the men were rising from the whist-table. It was a quarter-past twelve now. It would be nearly one o'clock before the fastest hansom could carry Mr. Tredethlyn to the Strand. Francis looked from the clock on the chimney-piece to the scrap of paper in his hand; hesitated for a few moments, with a black

frown upon his face, and then started hastily from his lounging attitude, and looked about him for his hat.

"There couldn't be a better opportunity," he muttered, "for saying what I want to say to him."

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## CHAPTER XXXV.

### A HASTY RECKONING.

HARCOURT LOWTHER had never played so bad a rubber as that with which he beguiled the evening while waiting Francis Tredeithlyn's appearance at the little bachelor-party assembled in his rooms. There was the usual blending of the hawk and pigeon tribe at Mr. Lowther's reunion: the birds of prey distinguishable by the purple blackness of their dyed moustaches and the crow's-feet round their faded eyes; the innocent fledglings fresh-coloured and tawny, with a profound belief in their own wisdom and a supreme contempt for everything outside the narrow circle in which they condescended to exist.

Mr. Lowther suffered his partner to knock under ignominiously to antagonistic sevens and nines, while the big cards lurked idle in his own hand, to fall at the close into the ravenous jaws of the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth trumps; nor was he to be roused into decent play by the unqualified remonstrances of his victim. He was thinking of Maude. It was not the face of the queen of spades which he saw as he sat hopelessly staring at the card in a vain endeavour to concentrate his attention; it was Maude's speaking, passionate countenance which looked at him, all aglow with angry feeling. He saw her in all her beauty as he had seen her that afternoon,—the tremulous lips, the flashing blue eyes,—for there are blue eyes which in anger have more fire than the starriest orbs that ever veiled their lightnings under the cloudy lace of an Andalusian marchesa. His love for her—which was one of the most selfish passions of a selfish nature—had grown and strengthened day by day since the hour of his return, and had kindled into an all-absorbing flame now that he seemed so near his triumph.

Was he near his triumph? That question occurred to him several times as he sat opposite his friend Captain Harrison of the Spanish Legion, playing the unluckiest rubber that the Captain had been engaged in for weeks,—"And the beggar had such first-rate cards too," as the Captain said afterwards, politely criticising his friend's play; "if he hadn't kep' his trumps so jolly dark we could have carried everything before us."

Was he near his triumph? He had been playing for two stakes—the woman he loved and the fortune he envied. He

knew Maude Tredethlyn well enough to know that so long as her husband lived, she was as far beyond his reach as the stars which shone down upon him as he walked home from Stucco-ville, and of whose light he thought so little. Maude, as the daughter of an insolvent trader, was a lovely being whom he had felt no reluctance to resign ; for he had looked forward with a horrible foresight to the day when the girl he loved should be again within his reach, no longer as a penniless spinster, but a wealthy widow. *This* had been the goal which Harcourt had seen at the end of that weary road along which he conducted the young man who trusted him. No physician ever watched a patient more intently than Mr. Lowther watched the slow undermining of the Cornishman's glorious constitution under the influence of late hours and hard drinking. The bloodshot eyes, the unsteady hand, the failing appetite, the uncertain spirits, the feverish unrest, were all diagnostics that marked the progress of the schemer's work. Mr. Lowther had seen so many young men drop down in the poisoned atmosphere to which he introduced Maude's husband. He hoped that the end which had come to so many would come to this ignorant, blundering rustic, into whose lap blind Plutus had cast the wealth that should have fallen to better men. The end must come ; for the stupid Croesus tumbled so helplessly into the snare, and abandoned himself so completely to his captor's mercy. It was only a question of patience. The end would come in due time : and then there was the woman he loved, and the richest widow in London, to reward the plotter's patience, to crown his efforts with happiness and success. To-day's business, Harcourt Lowther argued, as he played that unfortunate rubber, could not be otherwise than a lucky stroke, likely to hurry matters to a crisis. Francis had slipped out of his hands so often of late, had kept better hours and drunk less. But a serious quarrel with Maude would inevitably fling Mr. Tredethlyn back upon the spurious Lethe of the brandy-bottle, and would hasten the schemer's work to its fatal close. "I think I have shut the door of his home upon him," thought Harcourt ; "it will be strange if he is not glad to drop completely into the groove in which I want to see him."

This, in plain English, is the plan which Harcourt Lowther had made for himself; though he would scarcely have put his scheme into such very plain words, even in his own thoughts. Iago, in a play or a novel, is obliged to give utterance to his schemes with tolerable clearness ; but the real Iago is reticent, even in commune with himself, and huddles his blackest thoughts into some dark corner of his mind, where they lie conveniently hidden from the eye of conscience.

Before twelve o'clock Mr. Lowther had abandoned his place

at the whist-table to his brother; and after lounging behind the chair of a young man who was playing *écarté*, and making a random bet now and then, the host proposed supper,—a proposition which was received very warmly by the men who were losing money, and very coolly by the winners. Harcourt Lowther's supper was almost as unceremonious an affair as that memorable entertainment in Lant Street, Borough, at which Mr. Robert Sawyer played the part of host. A young man, hired for the occasion from a neighbouring tavern, laid the cloth very rapidly, while the guests lounged against the corners of the mantel-pieces, and grouped themselves in little knots, to discuss coming events in the racing world, or to criticise current pictures and current theatricals, with an occasional spice of current scandal.

The supper was very simple. There were unlimited supplies of those delicate little oysters which seem created with a special view to bachelors' supper-parties, and the refreshment of exhausted playgoers; and whose native beds the ignorant foreigner might not unnaturally imagine to lie somewhere at the back of the Strand. And to wash these down, Mr. Lowther had provided Chablis, white Hermitage, and Rüdesheimer. There were spatch-cocks and devilled kidneys, fried potatoes, monster lobsters, marvellous cheeses from the remotest cantons of Switzerland, and the most delicate varieties of green-stuff from a French fruiterer's in the purlieus of Leicester Square. There was no pretence of an elaborate entertainment; but there was an open case of sparkling Moselle by the side of Mr. Lowther's chair, into which he dipped about once in five minutes; and the young man from the tavern had been initiated into the mysteries of a claret-cup, which he compounded at a rickety little side-board in the inner room.

So far as the guests went, the supper was a success. There was just the amount of confusion which gives a picnic flavour to a meal, and which seems an infallible stimulant of animal spirits. Mr. Lowther's visitors enjoyed themselves immensely, and the party was becoming boisterous in its gaiety, when the door was opened, and Francis Tredethlyn walked in.

Harcourt Lowther pushed away the Moselle case, which was now only filled with tumbled straw and empty bottles, and called for a chair, which was edged into the corner at the host's right hand.

"You'll have some supper, Tredethlyn?" he said, while Francis was shaking hands with some of the men. They were all known to him, and all knew his story, and had a pretty clear idea that Harcourt was what they called "cleaning him out," in the most approved style by which the process can be performed. "These things are all cold, I'm afraid. Jones, run across

and get some fresh oysters, and you can order another spatchcock—to be ready in a quarter of an hour at the latest. Sit down, dear boy. What the deuce have you been doing with yourself all night? Give him elbow-room, Harding, that's a good fellow, and don't knock your ashes on to this corner of the table-cloth just yet. Now, then, Philcote, the 'Last Rose of Summer' as soon as you like; but you may as well make up your mind what key you'll sing it in *before* you begin."

Francis called back the man as he was hurrying from the room.

"Stop!" he cried; "you needn't order anything more—for me. I shan't eat supper to-night."

Something in his tone arrested every other voice; and there was a silence as sudden and as complete as if some magician had waved his wand and changed Harcourt Lowther's guests into stone. Something in his look attracted every eye, and held it fixed in a wondering stare upon his face. Mr. Philcote, who fancied himself an amateur Sims Reeves, was disturbed in his calculation of that vocal bullfinch to be cleared between the third and fourth notes of the "Last Rose of Summer," and abandoned all thoughts of singing his favourite ballad.

The Cornishman's colourless face and disordered hair and dress might have suggested the idea that he had been drinking; but there was an inscrutable something in that white face which was not compatible with drunkenness. Harcourt Lowther looked at him nervously. The marital quarrel had come off, evidently, and Francis took matters very seriously.

"Come, Mr. Troublefeast," cried the host, "we're not going to stand this sort of thing, you know. We'll have no statue of the Commander stalking in upon us in the midst of our fun—without Mozart. What the deuce is the matter with you, dear boy? Roderick, pass that tankard this way, will you? You fellows down there contrive to keep everything to yourself. Let the rosy vintage circulate. There's another half-dozen of the claret in the next room, and no end of lemons. So the moment for the selfishness of the savage to overpower the civilization of the gentleman has not arrived. Come, Frank, take down the shutters, and light up; you've made us all as quiet as the frozen crew described by that pertinacious old bore, the Ancient Mariner. Take a long dip into that tankard, old fellow, and come up bright again."

Mr. Lowther struck his small white hand lightly upon his friend's shoulder as he concluded. Francis had dropped into the place offered to him, and sat there, looking like nothing *but* the Commander, in his stony rigidity of face and figure. As Harcourt Lowther's hand alighted on his shoulder, he startled every one by throwing it deliberately away from him.

"I have had enough of your friendship, thank you," he said; "henceforward, if we are to be anything at all to each other, I had rather we should be foes—I may have better luck perhaps that way."

"Tredethlyn! are you drunk? or mad?"

"Neither, but I *have* been both; for I have trusted you. You needn't ask me what I mean," said Francis, interrupting Harcourt Lowther's exclamation by a rapid gesture of his uplifted hand; "I am going to tell you, and very plainly. Gentlemen, you were going to listen to a song just now; have you any objection to hearing a story instead? There will be time for your ballad afterwards, you know, Philcote. My story is not a long one."

Harcourt Lowther had turned very pale. His light blue eyes glittered, and the slim white fingers of his right hand closed involuntarily on the knife that had been lying near them. He looked as a man might look, who marching proudly upon the road to victory, saw the earth yawn asunder beneath his feet, and knew all at once that his next step must hurl him to a dreadful death. He was very quiet; but the quivering of his thin nostrils, the quickening of his breath, and his faded colour, betrayed a degree of hesitation which set his guests wondering, and infused a dash of excitement into the wind-up of the little banquet. The highest development of Christianity cannot quite extinguish the natural savage. Cromwell's Ironsides did murderous work with the gospel in their wallets and pious exclamations upon their lips; and it seems the attribute of human nature to delight in a row. The guests at Harcourt Lowther's supper-table pricked up their ears with one accord, and it was with considerable difficulty that they managed to keep up a faint attempt at that kind of conversation which had engaged them, in twos and threes, before Francis Tredethlyn's entrance. When they spoke to one another now, it was only in undertones, and their disjointed sentences revealed the fact that they were listening to the speaker at the end of the table. But when Francis spoke of telling a story, the company dropped all pretence of indifference to him; and listened with a polite appearance of perfect unconsciousness as to any unfriendly intention on the part of the late visitor.

"Sing your song, Philcote," said Harcourt Lowther, resolutely; "we want no stories—we've no time for twaddle of that sort. Let's have a good song or two, and then we'll go into the next room for a rubber."

Mr. Philcote, whose nerves were fluttered by the ominous gloom that had so suddenly fallen upon the assembly, gave a despairing cough, and made a husky plunge at the A flat on which he should have begun the sweetest song-writer's sweetest song;

but before he had articulated his initiatory “ ‘Tis,” a big man with a black moustache, who owed Harcourt Lowther a grudge, and had been consuming the best bits of the lobsters, and the lion’s share of the Moselle, under a mental protest, interrupted the timid singer :

“ Let’s have the story first, and the ‘ Last Rose ’ afterwards,” he said. “ Fire away, Tredethlyn; your audience have supped luxuriously, and are in good humour.”

“ I dare say it’s a common story enough in your set, Boystock,” answered Francis; “ but it isn’t a long one. It is the story of a man who was lifted one day from poverty to wealth, and found himself all at once alone in a world as strange to him as if he had been transported out of this planet into another inhabited by a different species.”

“ Egad,” muttered Mr. Boystock, “ I wish somebody would transport me!”

“ Ah, it isn’t likely, old fellow, in *that* way,” murmured his neighbour.

“ For some time the country-bred cub—he was country-bred, and what you would call a cub—got on well enough. He floundered into a few mistakes, and he floundered out of them, after his own ignorant fashion. I think there is a providence for such men, as there is for drunkards, and so long as they stagger along *alone*, they come to very little grief. He did a great many silly things with his money, I dare say; but I think he once did a generous thing—though, God knows, in doing it, he only followed the blind impulse of his undisciplined heart as ignorantly as if he had been some blundering Newfoundland dog that pulls the mistress he loves out of the water where he sees her drowning. His wealth prospered with him, though he had cared little enough for it when it fell into his hands. By means of it he was able to save the woman he loved from a great trouble; and in her boundless gratitude for the service which he valued so lightly, she abandoned herself to the purest impulse that ever stirred a noble breast, and offered him her hand. If he had been generous or wise, he would have refused the hand which could not give him a heart. He was only—in love. Selfishly, stupidly, he seized the proffered sacrifice; too besotted in his blind passion to perceive that it was a sacrifice.”

Mr. Lowther’s guests stared blankly at one another. They had not dropped their own talk to hear such stuff as this. Harcourt sat very still, with his hand always upon the knife. At the other end of the table lounged Roderick, the very picture of well-bred indifference. He felt that his brother had dropped in for it; but he had no idea of interrupting the action of the little drama by any fraternal championship.

"Let them fight it out their own way," he thought; "I like to see the white man suffer."

"The country-bred cub was still fresh to the intoxication of his fancied happiness, when a man who had been familiar with him in his poverty came from the distant part of the world where they had met and known each other, and offered to be his friend. The cub's ignorance of life was so complete, that he did not know it was possible for a man who bore her Majesty's commission, and called himself a gentleman, to be a liar and a villain. He trusted his old acquaintance implicitly, and accepted him as a friend—believing, still in his boorish ignorance, that there was such a thing as friendship, or, at the worst, an honourable good fellowship between honest men. His friend did not tell him that he had been the engaged lover of the woman the boor was going to marry; and when the young couple began their new life, he planted himself in their house; and his first act was to shut the husband from the home whose dingiest room was a paradise, so long as it was sanctified by the presence of an idolized wife. Will any one at this table guess the plot which the boor's friend hatched against him in the hour when their hands first met in friendship? I think not. The gentleman—polished, well-born, highly educated—allowed the country cub to marry the woman he loved; reserving to himself the hope of marrying her, enriched by the cub's money, when the cub was dead. This once arranged, there was only one thing more to be settled; and that was the cub's life. Unluckily he was a brawny six-foot fellow, with the constitution of a prize-fighter. But then prize-fighters are not always long-lived; their habits are so apt to be against them. Well, gentlemen, there have been men who have undermined a victim's strength with small doses of antimony, while they smiled in his face, and called him brother. We manage these things better nowadays. The gentleman resolved that the boor should drink himself to death."

"Is this the plot of a French novel?" asked Roderick, superciliously, after a brief silence, in which Francis Tredehlyn had paused to take breath; "if it is, you had better tell us the title of the book, and let us read it in the original. There may be some chance of our thinking it interesting *then*."

"There are shameful things done out of novels as well as in them, Mr. Lowther," answered Francis. "What I am telling you is the truth. The gentleman took the wealthy boor under his protection, and from that hour the cub's mind and the cub's body began to wither under the influence of a vice which of himself he held in abhorrence, but which in the dull indifference of a man who has no hope to elevate him, no aim to strive for,

he was weak enough to accept as the cure for all his troubles. What did it matter how many glasses of brandy he drank, or how often he staggered across his dreary threshold in the early morning, stupefied by foul gaslit atmospheres and bad wines? His friend took care to remind him that there was no one to be sorry for his misdeeds, or to rejoice in his repentance if he repented. He could not sink so low that his wife would be affected by his degradation; he could not rise so high that she would be proud of his elevation. His friend dinned the bitter truth into the wretch's ear. The beautiful young wife despised him; the wealth that other men envied was useless to him except in its power to buy the oblivion of the brandy-bottle. From the hour in which his well-born friend took him under his protection, the boor never did a generous action, or heard a noble sentiment; and he very rarely went home sober. He was drinking himself to death as fast as a strong man can, when Providence took compassion on him, and gave him a duty to fulfil. A helpless girl, his kinswoman, was thrown across his path, and all at once he found himself of use in the world. From that moment his friend's scheme was overthrown. Good-bye to the brandy-bottle and the bad wines! The boor had a friendless woman dependent on his protection, and he had something to live for. He determined to sink the past; bid farewell to the wife whose affection he was unable to win; turn his back upon the circle he had lived in and the people who had known him; and finish his days honestly among honest men."

"So he died, and she very imprudently married the barber," exclaimed Mr. Boystock. "It's a very good story, I dare say; but apropos to what?" demanded the gentleman, looking at Harcourt Lowther with a malicious twinkle in his little black eyes. "I don't see the connection with the proverbial *bottes*. What does it all mean?"

"It means, gentlemen, that I am the boor who has been **the** dupe of a villain, and will be **so** no longer; and the name of the villain is Harcourt Lowther."

There was a moment's silence, followed by a sudden smashing of glass. A pair of small sinewy white hands fastened eat-like upon Francis Tredethlyn's throat, and he and Harcourt Lowther were grappling each other in a fierce struggle. It was very long since the gentleman had been weak enough to get in a passion. He had sat as still as a statue while the Cornishman set forth his indictment, waiting to see how completely he had failed; and now that he knew that his plot, so deliberately laid, so patiently carried out, was only a bungling business after all—for the man *must* have bungled who fails so utterly—Mr. Lowther lost his head all in a moment, and abandoned himself

to a sudden access of rage, that reduced him to the level of a wounded tiger.

It was scarcely with Francis that he was angry. What did it matter how this man spoke of him or thought of him? What did it matter that these other men should hear him accused of a baseness, which was only an intellectual improvement upon the vulgar process by which the gentlemanly birds of prey plucked the tender plumage of their victims? All this was nothing. It was against himself—against his own failure—that Harcourt Lowther's fury was raging; only like all fury of that kind, it was ravenous for vengeance of some sort. It was only for about twenty seconds that his claws were fastened on Francis Tredethlyn's throat. A Cornish heavy-weight is not exactly the kind of person for a delicately-built Sybarite to wrestle with very successfully.

"We are rather celebrated for this sort of thing in my county," Mr. Tredethlyn muttered between his set teeth, as he loosened Harcourt Lowther's grasp from his throat, and hurled him in a kind of bundle to a corner of the room, where he fell crashing down amongst the ruins of a dumb-waiter, half buried under a chaos of broken bottles and lobster-shells.

Roderick Lowther would have sprung upon his brother's foe in the next minute, but the other men hustled round him and hemmed him in.

"Don't you see the fellow's a Hercules?" cried one of them; "let him alone, Lowther."

"Let me go!" roared the diplomatist; "I know my brother's a false-hearted rascal, but I won't stand by and see a Lowther played at ball with by any boor in Christendom. Let me get at him, Boystock, or I shall hurt you." But Francis had walked quietly to the door, and turning with his hand upon the lock, waited for a moment's pause in the confusion before he spoke.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you are witnesses that your friend attacked me. I have no quarrel with Mr. Roderick Lowther; and as I am the bigger man of the two, there would be no credit for either him or me in a scuffle between us. If Harcourt Lowther wants to see me, he will be able to find me any time this week at the Grand Hotel, Covent Garden; after this week I shall sail for South America by the first packet that leaves Liverpool."

He paused a second time. There was no answer. The diplomatist had thought better of his thirst for fraternal retribution.

"Why should I get myself into a mess about the beggar?" he thought; "he wouldn't see me out of a scrape, I dare say."

So Francis departed unquestioned: not to return to the

Stuccoville mansion, but to walk up Southampton Street, and across Covent Garden, to seek a shelter in the old lodgings where he had lived so pleasantly in his bachelor days.

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## CHAPTER XXXVI.

## POOR FRANK'S LETTER.

MAUDE shut herself in her own rooms after her interview with Francis, and refused to see any one except Julia. She wanted some one to cling to in her sudden distress, and was fain to throw herself upon the Irish girl's bosom for consolation.

Then Julia Desmond had her revenge. It was very sweet to see the woman who had usurped the cup of prosperity once held to her own lips brought down so low; more wretched in the midst of her wealth and grandeur than Julia had been in her lonely attic at Bayswater, with a July sun glaring in upon her through a curtainless window, and the drowsy voices of her pupils droning in her ears. The pleasure that thrilled through her breast as she held Maude Tredethlyn in her arms, and heard her declare, amidst passionate sobs, that Francis had been false and base and wicked, and that she was the most miserable woman in the world, was a sensation more exquisite than Miss Desmond had ever known before. For the honour of humanity, that wicked pleasure did not last very long. The daughter of Patrick Macnamara Ryan O'Brien Desmond was not altogether base. Maude was at her feet, and she was avenged. It was her rival's insolent happiness—happiness always does seem insolent to the unhappy—that had galled her to the quick. The two women were on a level now, and Julia forgave her old companion.

"I told you he was a villain," she said; and that was the only unkind speech she uttered. After that, she was comforter, confidante, friend, and she was almost sorry to see the endurance of Maude's grief. "You have your fine house and your carriages still," she said, as the young wife sat on the ground at her feet in the abandonment of her sorrow; "you could never have married Francis Tredethlyn for any other reason than the wealth he could give you. What does it matter to you whether he is true or false? You never loved him."

"No," answered Maude, naively, "I suppose not. But it is so shameful of him to care for anybody else. And from what Harcourt Lowther says, he does care for that horrible person; and to leave me, Julia, day after day, and to be—there—all the time—in a garden—smoking—looking as much at home as if he had lived there all his life—I never can forgive him, Julia!"

"Of course not," Miss Desmond replied promptly; "but I don't see that you need make yourself so very unhappy about his conduct. You will have a formal separation, I suppose. Your papa, or your papa's solicitors, will manage that, no doubt; and you will live quietly in a smaller house than this. You will not be able to go so much into society, you know; for it is so difficult for a woman who is separated from her husband to escape scandal, however careful she may be," Julia added, with considerable satisfaction. It is so nice to sit in the dust and mingle our sympathetic tears with those of the fallen powers who have lately queenied it over us.

Maude's sobs redoubled.

"Society!" she exclaimed. "I hate society! Yes, it's no use talking, Julia. I know what you're going to say about my going out to three parties a night, and so on; but I don't like it—nobody likes it. They get into the whirlpool, and there they are. If you go to Mrs. A.'s Thursday, you must go to Lady B.'s Friday, or you offend her; and if you go once, you must go on going, or it seems as if you didn't like the people you met; and then, if you don't ask people, you are accused of dropping them; and if you ask strange people, you are accused of picking them up; and if you always ask the same people, your parties are called slow; and if you ask different people, you are called capricious. I am so tired of the world, Julia," sighed Mrs. Tredeithlyn. "When I drive any distance to dinner on an autumn evening, I always envy the people who live in little villas, and drink tea at seven o'clock in pretty parlours that I can see in the firelight. They seem *so* happy. I never hear a muffin-bell—don't laugh, Julia; but there *is* something peculiar in a muffin-bell—without thinking how hollow my life is, compared to the lives of the people who eat the muffins. And then I fancy that I should have been so much happier in a pretty little cottage in St. John's Wood, with a tiny, tiny back-garden sloping down to the canal, and a still tinier garden in front for Floss to bark in. I used to think sometimes," continued Maude dropping her voice and speaking with some slight embarrassment, "that Francis and I would get to understand each other better by-and-by, and that we should lead quite a Darby-and-Joan sort of life, doing a great deal of good, and going out much less. But, of course, that hope is quite gone now. I can never endure his society again. I could never trust him. And oh, Julia, I did trust him so implicitly! I had such a belief in his goodness that I despised myself for not being better worthy of him. And to think that he should deceive me so cruelly; that he should have been deceiving me all along, leading a wicked life amongst wicked people for his own pleasure; when I fancied

that he was driven from his home by my indifference, and reproached myself so bitterly for being wanting in my duty to him."

In this strain poor Maude discoursed at intervals for some hours. Julia was very patient, sympathetic even, in a hard kind of way; but she bore with all her weight upon the evidence of Francis Tredethlyn's perfidy, and she drained the cup of her triumph to the very dregs.

It was not till the next morning that the letter which Francis had left in the library was delivered to his wife. She was sitting in her boudoir, with an untasted breakfast before her, and the sympathetic Julia on the other side of the table, when her maid brought the missive, which a housemaid had discovered at day-break on her master's table, two or three hours before Mr. Tredethlyn's valet found the little bedroom behind the library untenanted, and perceived that his master had not slept at home.

The Cornishman's letter was very simply worded. Maude opened it hastily in the hope that it might contain some justification of her husband's conduct. But he did not even allude to his delinquencies, and confined himself to bidding an earnest and friendly farewell to the wife who had never loved him. Tears of disappointment, humiliation, regret, poured slowly down Maude's cheeks as she read the letter. It was the first time Francis had written to her since her marriage; and there was something almost strange to her in the sight of his bold commercial hand, whose accustomed regularity had been a little disturbed by the writer's agitation.

"**M**Y VERY DEAR WIFE,—I write to you for the first time since it has been my privilege to address you by that sacred name. If I could tell you the pride and happiness I once felt in that privilege, when first you laid your hand in mine, when first I heard you called by my name, I should be a very different person from what I am; and then it is possible this letter need never have been written. I write to bid you good-bye, Maude; and I think the best proof I can give you of my love is the proof I give you now, when I bring my mind to the necessity of our separation, and resign myself to the knowledge that I may never see your face again upon this earth.

"I will not tell you how soon I discovered your indifference—how soon another person demonstrated to me that your feeling towards me was even something worse than indifference; that it was dislike and contempt which I inspired in your mind. My dense ignorance of the world, and your amiable nature, would have prevented my making this discovery of my own accord. But there are always plenty of those 'good-natured friends' the

man in the play talks about. *I found such a friend.* If you have any curiosity upon the subject, Rosa Grunderson, who is a good honest-hearted little girl, will tell you the name of the man who opened my eyes to the full misery of my position. In writing this, Maude, I have no thought of reproach against *you*. To me you have been and always will be something so bright and lovely as to be amenable to none of the common laws which govern common natures. When you offered to be my wife, you yielded to a generous impulse; and it is I who deserve reproach for having been so base in my blind selfishness as to accept the sacrifice you were willing to offer in repayment of a fancied obligation. I cannot undo the past; but I can at least set you in some manner free from the fetters you forged for yourself under the influence of that brief enthusiasm. So long as I live, one of the miseries of my life will be the knowledge that I shut you out of a brighter fate; that I deprive you of a more worthy companion; that the greatest sacrifice I can make in atonement of the past will only make you the lonely widow of a living husband. But I can at least rid you of the society of a man whose presence inspires you with disgust and loathing. O Maude, I am quoting your own words; spoken so deliberately, so coldly, that I should be indeed mad and cowardly, were I to shrink from accepting them in their fullest import. I might have doubted until to-night; I might have hugged myself with the notion that a liar and a scoundrel, for his own base purposes, had taught me to think myself despised and disliked; but your own lips have spoken, and I can doubt no longer. Oh, my darling, my pet, my beloved, this seems so like a reproach; but it is not, it is *not*.

"I am going to South America. When you read this, my preparations will no doubt have begun. If possible, I shall sail immediately. Of all the men who ever left England for that fiery young world out yonder, there was never, perhaps, any one better adapted to be happy and successful there than I am. I bid good-bye for ever to the idle dissipations, the drunken orgies in which I have sometimes found distraction, but never happiness. And I begin a new life in a new field of labour. My uncle's money has been the root of all my misery, and I shall take very little of that useless gold to the other shore. I don't think I was ever guilty of any great folly while I was a poor man; but since I have been a rich one, my life has seemed one long mistake.

"I write so much about myself and my own plans because I do not want the memory of me, or of any sorrow which I may feel in this parting, to cloud the brightness of your future; and I understand your generous nature well enough to know that

you will be happier if you can believe that I am happy. O Maude, if you could know how anxious I am that the life before you should be a bright and happy one, you might almost forgive me for the pain my selfish folly has inflicted upon you! My poor, generous-hearted girl! my innocent darling! you thought it was so light a thing to link your life to the life of a man whom you could not love; and you have borne your burden so quietly. I cannot release you from the chain that binds you to me, but I will do my best to make that chain a light one. And, for the rest, I go to a country in which life and death walk hand in hand together. I take with me all an ignorant man's love of adventure, a soldier's indifference to danger. Wear your chain patiently, darling,—you may not have to wear it long. But one word of warning from the man who has loved you so foolishly, and, until this night, so selfishly. You have married hastily once. Weigh well what you do if ever you marry again. If you accepted for your husband an ignorant West-country boor when you married me, I was at least an honest man. If I die, Maude, and you are free to make a second marriage, be sure that the husband of your choice has something of your own noble character; as well as some smattering of the accomplishments that please you, and the tricky jargon about art and literature which passes for cleverness. I was anxious once to make myself a gentleman for your sake, Maude; and when we have been visiting together, I have listened to the men's talk, for I wanted to find out how it was done; and you could never guess how spurious some of that brilliant conversation sounds to a man who *only* listens. I used to read some of your Mudie books in my own room sometimes of a morning,—Froude, and Carlyle, Burton, Barth, and so on; and I've heard men laying down the law about them at night, and I have known from their talk that they hadn't read a page of the book itself, and were only airing the second-hand opinions picked up out of a review.

"I saw you shudder once, Maude, because I didn't know it was the right thing to say 'Barkley Square,' and pronounced the word as it is spelt. But oh, what bosh I've heard the Barkley-Squarers talk sometimes about things I do understand! I've heard a man at a dinner-party hold forth about our convict system sometimes, and transportation, and Van Diemen's Land, till I've been inclined to get up and do something to him with a carving-knife; and oh, the self-satisfied manner of the creature, and the way he has lifted his eyebrows and looked at *me*, if I ventured to express any opinion upon the subject! In South America there may be fever and disease, perhaps—privation, danger; but there will be no Barkley Square. I may meet

with Aztecs, who may maltreat or even assassinate me; but they won't have little bits of glass that they can't see through to hitch into their eyes whenever I speak to them. And they won't lift their eyebrows and begin to whisper about me the moment I enter a room. And I shall never hear them say, 'Oh, the rich Tredethlyn, is it? Gad, what a clodhopper!'

"Why do I write about these things, Maude, when I am writing to bid you good-bye for ever? Only because I want you to believe there is *something* wanting even in the perfect world in which you live. If my death should set you free in your youth, marry again, dear, by all means; but marry a man whose truth and loyalty have been proved by a life of unblemished honour; marry a man who has set his mark upon the age—who has *done something*; for such a man is scarcely likely to be a scoundrel. Above all, darling, accept my warning against one man: *do not marry Harcourt Louther.*

"All the privileges that you have enjoyed during your bondage you shall retain in your freedom. Before sailing, I shall make my will, in which you will be left residuary legatee, and recipient of the bulk of my fortune. While I live, your income will be large enough to support the style in which you have lived during the past year; and there will be a wide margin left for the indulgence of every impulse of your generous heart. I shall place full directions as to the management of my fortune in the hands of my solicitors, Messrs. Kursdale and Scardon; and they will call on you by my direction to explain your position immediately after receiving my instructions. You will find yourself the mistress of the larger part of the income derived from my late uncle's investments and from the Cornish estate, and you will have no further trouble than to sign your name now and then, when the lawyers want you to do so. In the interim I enclose a cheque for £500, so that you may not be without ready money. Your father's affairs are now, he tells me, in a very easy state, and I do not leave him in troubled water. He may consider you his creditor for the interest of the thirty thousand sunk in his business; and I don't suppose he will find you a very importunate one.

"And now good-bye indeed. I leave you with all confidence in your noble heart, your high principles. You are too good and pure to be otherwise than happy. Far away on the Pampas, lying under canvas, with the long silvery trail of the moonlight on the grey expanse beyond my tent, the whisper of faint winds among the long grasses sounding in my ears, I shall think of you, and see you happy in the old English garden at Twickenham, loitering on the terrace by your father's side. In that trackless loneliness, fever-parched perhaps, and far away from

the chance of water, I shall think of the blue English river, but never think of it without seeing your image standing by the tide, your bright face reflected in the glassy stream. Oh, Maude, I have loved you so dearly, so fondly! and now that it comes to saying good-bye, it seems almost as difficult to tear myself from this lifeless sheet of paper, as it would be to take my lips away from yours in a last long kiss. My pet, my darling, God bless you, and good-bye! Think of me sometimes; but never with pain. Some midnight, when you are waltzing in a crowded ball-room, with a brazen band braying in your ears, and the hum of a hundred voices round about you, think that in some savage wilderness a man is kneeling under God's blue sky, praying for you as few people are prayed for on this earth; think sometimes, if a special peace comes down upon you, like the cool shadow we have watched drop slowly upon the river when the sun was down, think, darling, that I am saying, 'God keep and guard her safely through the night! God fill her heart with peace and gladness, whether she sleeps or wakes!'

"And so, my own dear wife, for the first and last time in my life, I sign myself your true and loyal husband,

"FRANCIS TREDETHLYN."

Julia had fluttered out of the room and into the little conservatory, where there were always faded leaves to be snipped off, or bird-cages to be replenished with fresh water. Miss Desmond, in her darkest mood, was too much a lady to sit by and stare while Maude possessed herself of the contents of her husband's letter. She lingered among the twittering canary-birds and sprawling ferns so long as she considered that delicacy demanded she should be absent, and then she strolled back to the breakfast-table with a look of supreme unconsciousness. But she gave a little scream as she glanced across the table at Mrs. Tredethlyn, and flew to the bell. Maude had finished her letter, which lay in scattered sheets at her feet, and she had fallen back upon the sofa-pillows in a dead faint.

### CHAPTER XXXVII.

#### ELEANOR DROPS IN UPON ROSAMOND.

It is strange what virtues we are apt to discover in the thing we have lost. After recovering from her fainting-fit, Maude Tredethlyn wept as bitterly for the loss of her husband as if he had been the first choice of her maiden heart. A young lady told Mr. de Quincey that, being on the point of drowning, she saw in one instant her whole life exhibited before her in its

minutest details, like a vast picture;—and so the young wife, reading her husband's solemn farewell, beheld in a moment the picture of her courtship and married life, and saw how good he had been to her. Yes, in that one moment a thousand instances—such trifling instances, some of them—of his goodness and devotion, his enduring love, his patient self-abnegation, flashed upon her, and her heart smote her with a bitter anguish as she perceived her own unworthiness.

"I had no right to take his love as I take the love of my dogs," she thought; "giving him nothing in return for his devotion." At first, as she read her husband's epistle, she smiled at his talk of leaving her, and thought how easy a thing it would be to lay her hand upon his shoulder and draw him down to his old place at her feet. She forgot all about the cottage at Petersham when she thought this. And then, as she read farther and farther, she recognized the solemn meaning of the letter, and felt that it was indeed a farewell. Then a sudden mist came between her and the page; all the machinery in London seemed buzzing and booming in her ears; and she fell back amongst the downy cushion, whiter than the pure ground of the rosebud chintz which Harcourt Lowther had selected for the upholstery of her nest.

She recovered very quickly under the influence of half a bottle of toilet-vinegar; and then there were more confidences to be poured into Julia's ear, when the maid, who was so sympathetic, and so ravenously eager to know why her mistress had fainted, was fairly out of the room.

Maude read Julia little bits of the letter, leaving off every now and then to demand pathetically *what* she was to do.

"He surely c-c-couldn't write like that, Julia, if he were what Harcourt Lowther says he is," sobbed Mrs. Tredethlyn. "He says I spoke to him coldly and deliberately. Oh, if he could only know what a passion I was in! There must be some horrible mistake; and if there is, what a wretch I must have seemed to him last night! Julia, advise me! give me some help! My husband must not go to America. There is a whole week for me to act in. What am I to do?"

"How can I advise you?" asked Julia. "I am so entirely in the dark—and you too. If Mr. Tredethlyn had given you *any* explanation of his presence at that strange house, domiciled so familiarly with that strange woman, you might accept it—if you could—and believe him. But he does not even attempt to explain or to justify his conduct. He passes it over in a manner which, I must confess, seems very ominous. To me, Maude, his silence is a tacit confession of his guilt."

Poor Maude turned the leaves of her husband's letter, and

looked wistfully at the blotted pages. If she could have only found some brief explanation of that Petersham business anywhere—in a postscript—a parenthesis! But there was none; and Mrs. Tredeithlyn put the epistle into her pocket, and looked at Julia with a very rueful countenance. Unluckily, she forgot that she had brought no specific charge against her husband, but had only attacked him in that vaguely denunciatory manner which is so essentially feminine.

"What a child she is!" thought Miss Desmond, as she watched her friend's tear-blotted face and quivering lip. "If I had a pair of high-stepping ponies to drive in the Park, and a couple of grooms to sit behind me, I would demand no explanation of my husband's absences, though he were to stay away from me for ten years at a stretch."

But it was the very reverse of this convenient code of morality to which Julia gave utterance presently, when she spoke to Maude.

"You ask me for my advice," she said. "If I am to give it frankly, I must own that in your place I would not touch Mr. Tredeithlyn's hand in friendship until he had accounted fully and conclusively for his presence in that garden yesterday. I would permit no reservations on the part of my husband; and I should be inclined to think that a secret kept from me was only another name for a wrong done to me."

Maude was silent for some minutes, wiping the tears from her face, and trying to escape from the demonstrative sympathy of a Skye terrier, who had been frantic at the sight of his mistress's distress; and then she exclaimed, with sudden energy that almost startled Miss Desmond,—

"Yes, I will take your advice, Julia; and Francis shall explain himself—as—as I'm sure he can."

This was a challenge which Julia was too wise to take up; for she saw that the wind had set violently in Francis Tredeithlyn's favour since Maude's perusal of his letter.

"I will insist upon an explanation from my husband; but before seeing him I will do what I should have done yesterday. I will go to that cottage at Petersham, and see the lady who was sitting in the garden with Francis yesterday afternoon. It is my right as a wife to know my husband's friends."

"You will see the—person," exclaimed Julia, on the tips of her lips, as the French say.

"I will."

"Well, perhaps, after all, it is not a bad plan," answered Miss Desmond, after a pause. "And if you do see that person, I dare say you will hear something unpleasant," she thought: "it is only fair there should be some counterbalance to your

grooms and ponies, even beyond Pickford's vans, and the sharp corner in Dean Street, Park Lane."

"Julia, you will go with me?" asked Maude, putting down her Skye terrier. "No, Floss, not to-day. Oh, I wonder whether *you* were ever married, and had this sort of thing to go through!—You'll go to Petersham with me, won't you, Julia dear?"

"Of course I will," answered Miss Desmond promptly; "it is a part of my *métier*. But how do you mean to go?"

"Oh, we'll drive."

"Your ponies?" asked Julia, spitefully.

The "steppers" were a late acquisition. Maude's childish cry of rapture at the sight of the Countess of Zarborough's equipage had sent Francis off to Tattersall's to bid for a pair of black ponies that Harcourt Lowther and his set had pronounced "clippers." You see an ignorant man's love is such a vulgar passion that it will express itself in this sordid way.

"Oh, Julia," cried Maude, "how could you? As if I would drive those frivolous ponies with a frivolous parasol fastened to my whip, and those two listening grooms behind me, when *my* heart is almost broken by Frank's conduct."

"Then you will go in the barouche?"

"Yes, and I can leave the carriage some distance from the house," Maude answered, with her hand upon the bell; "and we'll go at once, Julia dear,—if you're sure you've finished breakfast," added Mrs. Tredethlyn, looking piteously at the cup of stagnant chocolate and unbroken roll, which bore witness to her own incapacity to eat or drink.

Of course Julia declared that she had breakfasted—as completely as a companion had any right to breakfast, she inferred by her manner; so the two ladies adjourned to their apartments. Mrs. Tredethlyn found her maid in her dressing-room, oppressed by such tender anxieties with regard to the adjustment of Maude's bonnet and shawl, that she was not to be shaken off till her mistress stepped into the barouche, and even then contrived to be the medium of communication with the coachman, to the setting aside of a stolid Jeames, who was so utterly weary of life in general as not even to be often interested in other people's business.

The confidante in white muslin is apt to have a hard time of it when Tilburina's affairs go badly; but Julia endured her burden with sublime patience. Maude, bewailing the inconstancy of her husband one moment, and lauding his devotion in the next, might now and then degenerate into an inconsistent bore; but, at the worst, she was more endurable than Maude insolently happy—a radiant floating creature, all lace flounces

and gauzy sleeves, like one of Mr. Buckner's portraits. Julia enacted her part of confidante very creditably during the drive from Stuccoville to Petersham, and submitted graciously to be left in the carriage, in a shady curve of the winding road, with the Skye terriers and the last new novel to keep her company, while Mrs. Tredethlyn went alone to face her rival.

Perhaps Maude's heart sank just a little with something akin to fear, as she tripped along the dusty road in dainty high-heeled boots and flounced petticoats, whose embroideries flickered to and fro in shadowy arabesques upon the sunlit ground. She was not at all strong-minded. Imagine Waller's Sacharissa stepping out of her coach in Eastchepe, with a negro page behind her, and one of the Duchess of Portsmouth's favourite spaniels nestling in the perfumed lining of her muff, bent upon a visit to a money-lender; or Pope's Belinda alighting from her sedan to attend a meeting of creditors. Imagine anything that is incongruous, or absurd, or impossible, and it will be scarcely more out of keeping than this picture of Maude Tredethlyn going alone to meet her rival, under the shelter of a point-lace parasol. And yet this injured young wife was as sincerely miserable as if she had worn sackcloth and ashes, or the sombre draperies which Miss Bateman has made so familiar to us in her impersonation of the jilted Leah.

Mrs. Tredethlyn went straight to the cottage with the old-fashioned iron gate and the ivy-bordered wall. A womanly instinct guided her, as by a kind of inspiration, to the spot where she had seen her husband so much at home with a nameless and unknown creature. An air of prim respectability pervaded the place, which Maude inspected as she waited for admission, and peered inquisitively through the iron scroll-work. There were none of the rose-coloured curtains and china flower-stands, the yelping lap-dogs and twittering birds, which Mrs. Tredethlyn had been taught to associate with those inhabitants of an outer world, in whom she perceived only overdone imitations of herself. Everything here had a prim countenanced prettiness of its own; and looking across the smooth lawn, Maude saw a slender girlish figure in a cotton dress bending over a flower-bed, while a little boy stood by with a tiny watering-pot, whose contents he dribbled industriously over his own toes.

Maude's summons was responded to by an elderly woman in black. She was very grim and stern, as people who dote upon small children usually are; and she was no other than the eminently respectable person at Chelsea, who wore rusty bom-bazine in mourning for the better days which lay far back in some remote period beyond the memory of her oldest acquaint-

ance. This person carried Maude's card to the lady in the cotton dress, and then swooped down upon the little boy with the watering-pot, and carried him away struggling.

Maude, still without the citadel, watched the girlish face as it bent over her card. She expected astonishment, confusion, defiance,—anything except what she saw, which was a half-pleased smile, a look of hesitation, and then a little glance towards the gate, and a cry of remonstrance to the elderly person now invisible.

"Oh, Mrs. Clinnock, how could you leave that lady outside? The key! ah, I see it's in the gate." Maude's fancied rival had crossed the little lawn by this time, and Rosamond was only separated from Eleanor by the iron scroll-work. "Dear Mrs. Tredethlyn, how very rude you must think my nurse! But so many people have called, out of mere curiosity I am sure, and I am so afraid of strangers—Francis knows that—for he knows how often he has begged me to see you; and it was only yesterday that I gave way, and said he might tell you all about me. But I didn't think you would come so soon," said Rosamond, with sudden tears welling up to her innocent brown eyes. She had opened the gate and admitted Maude while she talked, and the two women were now standing face to face.

Mrs. Tredethlyn's mystification was depicted upon her countenance, which at first expressed only her complete bewilderment; then a chilling expression came over her face, a scornful smile curved her lip, and she looked at her rival with her head poised as haughtily as ever Eleanor's could have been when she offered Lord Clifford's daughter that agreeable choice between the bowl and the dagger.

"Oh, I see," she thought; "this person is trying to disarm my suspicions by her cool impertinence."

"It was so kind of you to come," murmured Rosamond, timidly. She was beginning to feel rather afraid of this haughty lady, who made no response to her warm greeting. "I did not think that I should see you so soon."

"No, I dare say not," answered Mrs. Tredethlyn; "I should scarcely imagine that you expected to see me at all."

Rosamond, otherwise Susan, clasped her hands and flushed crimson to the roots of her hair.

"Ah, then, you too are unkind, like my father," she cried piteously. "You do not believe what Francis told you."

Maude was almost too indignant to remark that piteous accent. It was not a gentle creature in distress that she saw. Jealousy looks through a medium that distorts the simplest objects into evil and threatening shapes. Mrs. Tredethlyn imagined that she beheld a shameless adventuress, who sought to disarm her justifiable suspicions by social histrionics.

"By what right do you call my husband by his Christian name?" she asked, indignantly.

"By what right!" stammered Susan, alarmed by the angry tones in which the question had been asked. "What else should I call him? I have called him Francis all my life, except when we were children, and then I called him Frank. Oh, he has been so good to me, Mrs. Tredethlyn! and he knows that the marriage was a real one. Oh, pray, pray don't look so coldly at me! don't doubt my word and his. I am as true and pure a wife as you are, though I have no husband's arm to lean upon, though even the name my husband gave me may be a false one."

Maude stared at the earnest face in new bewilderment. Not even jealousy could distort the expression of that face into anything but innocence.

"What does it all mean?" she cried at last; "who and what are you?"

"Susan Turner, Oliver Tredethlyn's daughter and Francis Tredethlyn's cousin," answered Susan, considerably puzzled in her turn; "who else could you suppose me to be, Mrs. Tredethlyn? Surely Francis told you all about me, or you could never have known where to find me."

"No, he told me nothing," exclaimed Maude; and then she pounced suddenly upon poor astonished Susy, and kissed her as she had never in all her life kissed any one before.

"Oh, you dear!" she cried; "oh, you darling! To think that you should be only his cousin after all, when I thought that—when I was wicked enough to think——"

Mrs. Tredethlyn did not say what she had thought, but bestowed another shower of kisses upon Susan.

"You pet!" she exclaimed; "and to think that I should never guess you were his cousin; and that he should never tell me, the silly fellow! And he let me go on at him too last night as if he had committed all sorts of crimes, and did not even deny them. And you are like him too. Yes, I'm sure you are; there's an expression about the eyes. Yes, there really is. Oh, how dearly I shall love you! I remember Francis speaking of you once; but he was very reserved upon the subject, and I did not like to question him. And so you really are his uncle Oliver's daughter! then we are cousins, you know, dear; almost sisters—and I never had a sister—or even a friend who was quite like a sister," added Maude, with a remorseful recollection of Miss Desmond waiting in the carriage.

She could have run on for an hour at a stretch, in her delight at the discovery that her husband was not a villain. The two women walked up and down the lawn together, while Susan related all her sad little history, and received Maude's tender assurances of sympathy and love.

Mrs. Tredethlyn was told how good her husband had been to his friendless cousin; and was pleased to dwell fondly on the story of Frank's kindness, his selection of that pretty house, his purchase of the furniture, and, above all, his goodness to the little boy.

Maude wanted Susan to go straight home with her in the carriage; but the Cornish girl clung to her sheltered home, and the iron gate that screened her from intrusive strangers.

"I am not used to the people amongst whom you live," she said; "it is very kind of you to wish to take me—but I could never be happy amongst strangers; and Robert and I are *so* happy here."

"And I came to break in upon your happiness like a horrible jealous fury," cried Maude; "but you see good has come out of evil; for now we have met, we shall love each other dearly always, shan't we, Susan? Call me Maude, please. And oh, my dear Susan, I have all sorts of troubles still to go through; for Frank was so offended by what I said last night, that he has written me a dreadful letter, in which he says he means to sail for America directly. But of course he won't. He never could leave me like that, could he, dear? And when I leave you, I shall drive straight home; and if he hasn't been home, I shall go on to his solicitors, Messrs. Something and Something, Gray's Inn,—I shall know their names when I see them in the Directory,—and of course they'll know his address wherever he is; and I shall go to him, and ask him to forgive me for having behaved so badly, and to-morrow he and I will come together, Susan. And now kiss me once more, dear, and *au revoir*; for I have a friend waiting for me in the carriage a little way off; and if her book doesn't happen to be interesting, I'm afraid she'll be cross, for I am sure I must have been an unconscionable time."

There was a little embrace, and then Susan opened the gate and Maude tripped away. The vulgar gravel seemed like empyreal air under her high-heeled boots this time; so changed were her feelings since she had discovered how deeply she had wronged her husband by the shapeless jealousies that Harcourt Lowther had inspired in her breast.

Julia looked with astonishment at her friend's altered countenance as Maude apologized for the length of her absence, while the *blasé* footman let down the steps; she was still more astonished when the carriage drove townwards, and Maude gushed into French, to the discomfiture of the footman, who had a habit of looking behind him for imaginary vehicles when his mistress's conversation happened to interest him.

In French, Maude informed Julia that the mythic rival had

melted into a "little cousin," who was "all that there is of the most charming," "an all young girl," "a candid angel," whom Mrs. Tredethlyn was ready to take to her heart forthwith. Julia found it a great deal harder to sympathize with Maude's happiness than with her misery.

But the happiness did not last very long; for on inquiry at Stuccoville, Maude found that her husband had not been home; and on penetrating Holborn-wards to Gray's Inn, to the disgust of the languid footman, she met with a second disappointment in the offices of Messrs. Kursdale and Scardon, who had heard nothing of the absent Mr. Tredethlyn. After this Maude drove homewards with a very sad countenance, and was glad to shrink from even Julia's sympathy, and to hide herself in her own rooms, where she paced disconsolately to and fro, listening for the crunching wheels and banging door of a hansom cab, and stopping every now and then to look hopelessly out into the monotonous street.

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## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### GONE.

**A**LL through the dreary day, and far into the still more dreary night, Maude Tredethlyn waited and listened for her husband's coming. She could not believe that he would hold to the purpose so earnestly expressed in his letter. His resolution had no doubt been fixed as the Monument itself while he wrote, for he had written immediately after his wife's unjustifiable denunciation of him; but surely long before the time came for action Francis Tredethlyn's purpose would waver, and the faithful slave would come back to his place at the feet of his mistress. In any case he would surely seek some explanation of Maude's anger.

"He never could be so cruel as to leave me because of a few foolish words," thought Mrs. Tredethlyn; "he could not be so unjust as not to give me the opportunity of explaining myself."

But on reading Francis Tredethlyn's letter for the third or fourth time, Maude discovered how complete the estrangement was that had divided her from her husband. The indignant reproaches inspired by unreasoning jealousy had been received by Francis as the deliberate utterance of a contemptuous dislike that had reached a point at which it could no longer be hidden under the mask of fashionable indifference. Mrs. Tredethlyn perceived, as she read that mournful letter, that, in her conduct of the previous night, her husband had only seen the miserable climax of his married life. He beheld, as he fancied,

his wife's silent scorn transformed all at once into passionate reproach; and the proud spirit which breathes in all simple natures had asserted itself in the farewell letter which Maude read through a mist of tears.

"He thinks I married him for his money, and that I have disliked and despised him," she thought sadly. "Ah, if he could know how often I have reproached myself for being unworthy of his devotion,—if he could know how my heart has sunk day by day as I have seen the breach grow wider between us! I fancied that I had lost his love, and yet this letter is full of the old devotion."

Maude awoke from the brief morning slumber that generally succeeds a sleepless night to a second day of suspense. She did not talk to Julia of her troubles now. They were growing too serious for feminine discussion or friendly sympathy. Mrs. Tredethlyn shut herself in her own rooms, and would see no one. She pleaded a headache, and the plea was no empty excuse; for when her all-absorbing anxieties permitted her to remember the existence of her head, she knew that it ached with a dull heavy pain which all the eau-de-Cologne in her dressing-case could not assuage. She roamed hopelessly to and fro between her bedroom and dressing-room, and failed most utterly in her attempt to hide her distress from the omniscient eye of her maid.

The second day passed, and there was no Francis. In the evening Maude despatched a messenger to Mr. Kursdale with a note of inquiry about Francis: had his solicitors heard or seen anything of him; and so on. The messenger was to wait an answer. But as old-established solicitors do not usually reside in Gray's Inn, the messenger found only darkness and stout oaken doors when he obeyed his mistress's behest. Maude wrote another letter that evening, addressed to Harcourt Lowther, and containing only these few lines, hurriedly written and with all the important words underlined:

"DEAR MR. LOWTHER,—Have you seen my husband since the day before yesterday? He left home on Tuesday night, and I have not seen him since. I am terribly anxious about him. I have been to Petersham, and have seen the lady. We were *quite wrong* about her, and I am *ashamed* of myself for having been *so foolish*. She is a *near relation* of Frank's; and his conduct to her has been *most noble*. Pray find him *immediately*, if possible, and show him this letter.

"Yours sincerely,

"M.T.

"*Thursday night.*"

A pleasant letter this for Harcourt Lowther to receive the next day, as he lay helpless on the lodging-house sofa, with his head and face sadly dilapidated by the effects of his fall under a shower of broken wine-glasses and cruets.

He groaned aloud as he read Maude's missive.

"Is there any possibility of comprehending a woman's tactics?" he muttered. "She writes as if this boor were an idolized husband. Is it all hypocrisy—or what? So the bubble of jealousy has burst, and the young person at the Petersham cottage *is* a cousin, after all; and Francis has kicked up his heels; and I lie here as miserably bruised and battered as if I had just been beaten in a fight for the championship, at the very time when I most want to be up and astir."

Yes, Mr. Lowther was a prisoner. He had been seriously shaken by the scuffle with Francis, and had been in the doctor's hands since the unpleasant termination of his supper-party. But this was not the worst. It was the disfigurement of his handsome face which Harcourt took most deeply to heart. A black eye or a scarred forehead will keep a man as close a captive as a warrant of committal to the Tower. At the very moment when the sudden entanglement of his web threatened to render all past efforts useless, when the schemer had most need of his dexterity, Harcourt Lowther found himself an un-presentable object, and knew that he must spend dreary weeks of seclusion before he dared emerge into the world once more, and take up the disordered threads which he still hoped to weave into a harmonious network. Imagine Paris, with all his plans laid for the abduction of Helen, brought suddenly to a standstill by a score of vulgar cuts and bruises, the sight of any one of which might have restored the lady to a sense of her duty. Harcourt Lowther, with his face bandaged, felt himself a contemptible creature, a modern Samson without the glorious remnant of a Samson's strength. For the first time in his life the fine gentleman discovered how much he depended on his handsome face, and what a lost wretch he would be without it.

He felt a savage rage against Roderick, who strolled in and out of the room half the morning, dressing and breakfasting by instalments, smoking, and writing letters, and crackling the daily papers, as it seemed to Harcourt, more persistently than newspapers were ever crackled before. He was free to sally forth after his careful toilet, while his junior lay on that rickety sofa as furious in his wretched helplessness as some wounded hyena. Roderick had volunteered to call upon Francis at the Covent Garden hotel, to demand a reckoning for the scuffle at the supper-party; but Harcourt declined the friendly offer.

"As soon as I can leave the house, I will go to him myself,"

he said. "The fellow's talk about going abroad is all bombast, I dare say. He will be sneaking back to his wife's apron-string now that I am laid by the heels."

When Harcourt had read Maude's letter, he tossed it over to his brother.

"Do you know how to reckon that up?" he asked. "What does it mean?"

Mr. Lowther the elder had by no means a high estimate of the female character. In his idea of the sex, the woman who was not a profound simpleton was only something very much worse than a simpleton.

"The fellow has *not* gone back to his wife; so that's one point in your favour, at any rate," said Roderick, after reading Maude's epistle. "I dare say he'll go altogether to the bad now, at a railroad pace, and finish himself off before the year is out. The lady's anxious inquiries about her husband may be read in more ways than one. This letter *may* be only intended to put *you au courant* as to the state of affairs. Unluckily, that ugly scar about your nose will prevent your calling on Mrs. Tredethlyn for some weeks. But I don't mind being brotherly for once in a way; and I'll look in at the Stuccoville mansion this afternoon, if you like. Virtue is sometimes rewarded, and there is just a chance that I *may* see the lovely Grunderson, and improve the occasion."

Harcourt, after a little deliberation, consented to this arrangement. His confidence in the honour of his brother was about as small as it could be; but as the interests of the two Antipholi were in this instance not antagonistic, he could scarcely have anything to fear from Roderick's intervention.

"You can tell Mrs. Tredethlyn that I am seriously ill," he said, when his brother was leaving him. "If you could drop a hint or two about a rapid decline—a secret sorrow undermining a constitution that was originally delicate—the sword and the scabbard, and so on, it would only be friendly to do so. Of course I have seen nothing of Francis since Tuesday, which is perfectly true; only you need say nothing of Tuesday night—curse him!" muttered Harcourt, with a lively recollection of the wounds inflicted by a broken vinegar-cruet, and the pernicious effects of the adulterated vinegar, as exhibited in his inflamed eyes. "You can take care to let Mrs. Tredethlyn understand that her husband has returned to his old haunts and his old companions; and that any anxiety she may be so absurd as to feel about him is wasted upon a person who would be the first to laugh at her folly."

"Dear boy, I have not served my country for nothing," answered the diplomatist. "You may trust in my discretion

and in my power to make the best of an opportunity. The people who plan a conversation beforehand never are able to talk according to their programme. The other party doesn't give the necessary cues. The man who trusts to the inspiration of the moment never makes a failure. The divine *aflatus* is always right; but you can't pump the sacred wind into a man with vulgar bellows. It comes, dear boy; and it will come to your humble servant, I have no doubt. I shall dine at the St. James's, and I've two or three places to go to in the evening; so I leave you to your reflections and the goulard-water. Adieu!"

The diplomatist had no opportunity of serving his brother by any sentimental hints about secret sorrows and mortal illness, for Maude sent Julia Desmond to receive her visitor, and to hear anything he might have to say about Francis. Mrs. Tredehlyn would see no one and would go nowhere. Julia had been busy all the morning writing excuses to people whose invitations had been accepted. Miss Grunderson had called, and had sent up pencilled supplications upon the backs of cards, imploring her dear Mrs. Tredehlyn to see her, if only for a few minutes; but Maude had been inexorable. There are sorrows which friendship is powerless to soothe; and in the time of such sorrow noisy friendship is above all things intolerable. Maude shuddered as she thought of Miss Grunderson's warm paws and schoolgirl endearments; so Rosa was sent away disconsolate.

Roderick Lowther would have been very well contented to loiter in Mrs. Tredehlyn's morning-room talking to Julia, whose half-haughty, half-defiant manner had a wonderful fascination for him; but that young lady gave him no opportunity of dawdling. She had seen his tactics with regard to Miss Grunderson, and took care to let him know that she understood his diplomacy; but she listened to all his insinuations against Francis, and he saw her eyes brighten as he uttered them.

"She will convey my hints to Mrs. Tredehlyn," thought the diplomatist, "and they won't lose by her interpretation; so I've done that fellow a service, and wasted my morning, since Miss Grunderson is not to be seen."

But on leaving Julia Mr. Lowther decided on speculating a call upon Rosa's papa. There was always the chance of seeing the young lady; and as Mrs. Tredehlyn's house could no longer afford a platform for the carrying out of Roderick's matrimonial schemes, it was absolutely necessary that he should try a bold stroke and advance matters. He had ascertained Rosa's address, and had no difficulty in finding the Grunderson mansion, which was close at hand. He was not very certain about the number of the house, but selected it unhesitatingly from its fellows for the vivid greenness of its blinds, and the intense newness which

pervaded every object that was visible through unshrouded windows of plate-glass. The Grunderson mansion bared its inner splendours unflinchingly to the eyes of the passer-by; and Mr. Grunderson's dining-room, superb in pollard oak, and with the Grunderson arms blazing on the scarlet morocco backs of the chairs, revealed itself to the very core of its heart to every buttermen's apprentice or butcher's boy who brought his wares to the area-gate. Thus Roderick Lowther found it very difficult not to make his perception of Mr. Grunderson, seated at the head of his table with a substantial luncheon before him, unpleasantly palpable while he rang the visitors' bell. Fortune favoured the diplomatist, for the hospitable millionaire insisted on his being ushered into the dining-room; very much to the discomfiture of Rosa, who was partaking of an unfashionable plate of underdone beef from the sirloin before her papa, and who had a big bottle containing some yellow compound in the way of pickle, and ornamented by a blazing label, on her right hand, and an imperial pint of Guinness's stout on her left. The stout and the embarrassment produced by Mr. Lowther's appearance combined to dye Rosa's cheeks with a very vivid carnation; but the diplomatist would have been less than a diplomatist if he had not appeared supremely unconscious of the two bottles and the underdone beef.

"Sit ye down, Mr. Lowther, and make yourself at home," exclaimed the hospitable Mr. Grunderson. "A knife and fork for this gentleman, Thomas; and look sharp about it. You'll find this here as fine a bit of beef as ever was cut from an Aberdeen bullock; and there ain't no bullocks equal to a Scotch short-horn, go where you will. Let me give you a slice out of the alderman's walk, which was a name my father always gave to the undercut; and a very good father he was too, though he never thought of my sittin' down to table upon the very spot where he built hisself a tool-house forty year ago, when you couldn't have got six pound an acre per annum for any ground about here. There's a pigeon-pie at the other end of the table, and there's some of your foreign kickshaws,—cutlets a la curl-papers, and mutton-chops a la smashed potato, I call 'em; for I'm not a young man, Mr. Lowther, and I can't remember your *soubeeses*, and your *maintenongs*, and your *jardineers*, and so on, as my daughter can. We don't have the men to wait at lunch, for my daughter says it isn't manners; and I'm very glad it ain't, for I can't say I enjoy my meals when I have to take 'em with a couple of fellows shoving vegetable-dishes and sauce-boats at me every two minutes, and never shoving the right ones; for I'm blest if I ever knew 'em yet to shove me the cucumber before I'd half finished my salmon, though they do

call themselves experienced servants. Howsomever, if we must dine ally Rousse, and wrap our mutton-chops in greasy paper and call 'em maintennong, we must, and there's an end of it; but I don't mind confessing to you, Mr. Lowther, that this is the time I make *my* dinner, and it's no use frowning at me, Rosa, for I don't care who knows it."

Mr. Lowther, whose luncheon generally consisted of a glass of seltzer-and-sherry and one small biscuit, escaped the infliction of one of Mr. Grunderson's plates of beef by a judicious manoeuvre, and helped himself to a morsel of pigeon-pie. But before doing so, he allowed his eyes to wander about the walls in contemplation of some impossible conglomerations of brown rockery and soapsud sky, which Mr. Grunderson called his Sallivaters; and thus gave Rosa time to dismiss her bottles and her plate, and to recover from her embarrassment.

After this everything went very smoothly. Mr. Grunderson expanded under the influence of bottled stout and Madeira, and was very loquacious; but sinking presently into a rather ster torous slumber, which he called forty winks, and which generally lasted about an hour and a half, the *ci-devant* market-gardener left Rosa and Roderick to their own resources. On this Mr. Lowther would have departed, but the candid Rosa begged him to remain. She had kept up a visiting acquaintance with most of her old school-fellows, and as she was perpetually making new acquaintances, she was positively besieged by callers, and had a tea-drinking institution, which she called a kettle-drum, almost every afternoon. The idea of exhibiting the elegant diplomatist to her feminine circle was eminently delightful to Miss Grunderson; and as soon as her papa had begun to snore with undisguised vehemence, she conducted Roderick to the drawing-room, where there were as many albums, and perfume-caskets, and ormolu workboxes, and enamelled book-slides, and *solitaire* boards, as would have stocked one of Messrs. Parkins and Gotto's show-rooms, and where a grand piano, scattered with all the easiest polkas in the gaudiest covers, testified to Rosa's taste for music.

Miss Grunderson's kettle-drum visitors began to assemble almost immediately; and before long Rosa's drawing-room was full of young ladies in overpowering bonnets and transparent cloaks of every imaginable tissue. The male element was very much in the minority at Miss Grunderson's gatherings, and was chiefly represented by speechless younger brothers, who came in sulky submission to overbearing sisters, and who lounged in uncomfortable attitudes upon Rosa's most fragile chairs, spilt their tea upon the velvet table-covers, rarely moved without knocking something down, and left dingy thumb-marks in all Rosa's

albums. Amongst such as these Roderick shone like a star of the first magnitude, and Miss Grunderson exhibited him with unspeakable pride. The kettle-drum lasted for two mortal hours, and Mr. Lowther was one of the last to depart, bored to death, as he told his brother afterwards.

"But a fellow must bring his mind to go through a good deal if he wants to marry a millionaire's only daughter in these hard times," thought the *attaché*, despondently, as he went yawning to bed. "If my lovely Rosa does become Mrs. Lowther, she will have to renounce her *penchant* for bad French and violent pink dresses; but she may cram her drawing-room with acquaintance of *quasi-gentility*, and drink tea all day, so far as I shall be concerned in the matter."

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## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### TOO LATE.

A LONG miserable week wore itself slowly out after the night in which Francis Tredethlyn had turned his back upon a house which he had never been allowed to find a home. Through all the week there were no tidings of Maude's departed husband; but when the week was over, a formal letter from Mr. Kursdale acquainted her with Mr. Tredethlyn's arrangements for her welfare, and with the fact that he had embarked the day before on board the steam-vessel *Kingfisher*, bound for Buenos Ayres. The news inflicted as great a shock upon Maude as if her husband's letter announcing his intended departure had never been written. To the last she had believed, that when the time for action came, his resolution would fail him all at once, and he would hurry back to her, faithful and devoted as in the earliest days of their brief married life, when he had nursed her Skye terriers, and sat patiently for an hour at a stretch in a haberdasher's shop while she selected ribands and laces. She had written him a penitent letter, and had enclosed it to Mr. Kursdale, entreating that gentleman to deliver it to his client whenever he saw him. She had not thought it possible that, even if Francis persisted in his intention of leaving England, he would leave without an interview with his solicitor. But when Maude drove post-haste to Gray's Inn, and presented herself in the lawyer's office, she found that there had been no interview. Francis had communicated with his solicitor by letter only, and his clear and concise epistle bore the date of the very day on which he was to start for Plymouth, whence the *Kingfisher* was to sail.

The letter thus dated had arrived at the lawyer's office after

business hours; and when Mr. Kursdale opened it next morning, there was little doubt that the *Kingfisher* was outward bound with Francis Tredethlyn on board her. Maude made a confidant of her husband's solicitor. A family lawyer is a kind of father-confessor in the matter of secrets, and has generally outlived the capacity of surprise as completely as those imperturbable disciples of St. Ignatius Loyola who are irreverently entitled "crows." The respondent wife told Mr. Kursdale that Francis had left home in consequence of a slight misunderstanding—(was any conjugal quarrel ever yet described by the belligerents as anything more than a slight misunderstanding?)—and she implored him to assist her in bringing about her husband's speedy return.

"But do you think he has really sailed?" she asked; "do you think he can have been so cruel as to leave England without even giving me the opportunity of imploring him to remain?"

Mr. Kursdale shook his head gravely.

"There is nothing in his letter to me which indicates indifference to your wishes," he said; "it is only a business letter; but in a practical way it is the strongest evidence of a husband's devotion that ever came to my knowledge. We lawyers are a matter-of-fact set of men, and we are apt to form our conclusions in a matter-of-fact way. What other people would treat as an affair of sentiment, we look at as an affair of figures; and I must say, Mrs. Tredethlyn, that gauged by that standard, your husband comes out nobly."

"But I want him to come back to me," Maude exclaimed, simply; "I don't want to be rich—or to live like a woman of fashion. He wrongs me most cruelly when he thinks that I married him for his money. I married him because he was good to my father. Do you think I could accept the income which that letter places at my disposal, knowing that my husband has left his native country because of me? Tell me what I am to do, Mr. Kursdale. I know that Mr. Tredethlyn is unhappy, and that a few words from me would set all right. What am I to do?"

"We must try to send him the few words, my dear Mrs. Tredethlyn," answered the lawyer, cheerfully. "South America is not so very far off nowadays; and you know that even in Alexander Pope's time a sigh might be wafted from Indus to the Pole, by means of ocean postage. We'll get your letter delivered to Mr. Tredethlyn as quickly as the improvements of modern science will allow, you may depend upon it. Shall I send the letter you enclosed to me the other day? Perhaps you would like to add something to it—another postscript, eh? Ladies have such a penchant for postscripts," said the lawyer.

lapsing into mild facetiousness, which he imagined to be of an eminently consolatory character. There are people who believe that a feeble joke is an infallible specific for a deeply rooted grief.

"I will send a clerk off to Plymouth by the next train," said Mr. Kursdale, with his hand upon the spring of a little bell beside him. He spoke as coolly as if he had been talking of sending a clerk over the way. "If by any chance the *Kingfisher* has not sailed when the young man arrives, your husband will have the letter before dark. If the *Kingfisher* has sailed, the letter must be sent on by the next mail. At the worst, Mr. Tredethlyn may be back in six or seven weeks."

In six or seven weeks! It seemed a very long time; but on receiving the lawyer's letter announcing her husband's departure, Maude had fancied that he was lost to her for ever. With what wonderful intelligence we can perceive the value of anything we have lost! In your daily walks, O modest collector of household treasures! you will see a little bit of china, a picture, an apostle spoon, a quaint old volume in a shop-window,—and, intending to look in and bargain for it some day when you have leisure, you will pass it a hundred times, indifferent as to its merits, half uncertain whether it is worth buying; but you discover some day that it is gone, and then in a moment the doubtful shepherdess becomes the rarest old Chelsea, the dirty-looking little bit of landscape an undeniable Crome, the battered silver spoon of unquestionable antiquity, the quaintly bound book a choice Elzevir. The thing is lost; and we regret it for all that it might have been, as well as for all that it was, and there are no bounds to the extravagance we would commit to regain the chance of possessing it.

It was something after this fashion, perhaps, that Mrs. Tredethlyn regretted her husband, as she drove home disconsolately after her interview with the lawyer, to await the result of his clerk's journey. She would have gone herself to Plymouth if she could have done any more than the clerk; but she had a dim belief that if there was infallibility anywhere on earth, it was to be found in the office of an old-established solicitor, and she thought that Mr. Kursdale's accredited agent could not fail to effect some good.

Her disappointment was very bitter the next day when she received a note from the solicitor, informing her that the *Kingfisher* had sailed twelve hours before the clerk arrived at Plymouth.

After this Maude could only await the result of her letter. Six or seven weeks seemed such a weary time as she looked forward to it; and it might be as long as that, or even longer,

before any tidings from Francis could reach her. She went to her father, to pour her sorrows into his ear; but though he received her very affectionately, she could see that he blamed her severely for the folly which had driven Francis Tredethlyn from his home.

She would have gone to stay at the Cedars during this dreary period; but she had a nervous dread of not being on the spot to receive any possible communication from her husband, so she remained amid the grand hotel-like splendour of the Stuccoville mansion; though her neighbours were daily departing for distant British watering-places, or on the first stage of continental wanderings, to toil amidst Alpine glaciers, or to lounge at German gaming-tables.

Mrs. Tredethlyn was very glad to see London growing empty; but before her acquaintance departed for their autumnal relaxations they had ample time to discuss her husband's disappearance and her own sudden withdrawal from society. The fact of that slight misunderstanding, which Maude had been obliged to confess to the solicitor, had become patent to all Stuccoville through the agency of loquacious maids and languid footmen, and had assumed every possible and impossible complexion in feminine debates. So Maude stood listlessly at one of the windows in her spacious bedchamber, sheltered by the voluminous curtains and the flowers in the balcony, and looked despondently at happy family parties driving away to railway stations with cargoes of parasols and umbrellas, and deliciously fluffy carriage-rugs and foot-muffs. Other people always seem so happy. The lives of those smiling Stuccovilians might not have been unclouded in their serenity; but Maude watched them very sadly, remembering how she and her husband might have been starting in the twilight for the Dover mail, like that merry young couple from the house over the way.

Surely she must have loved him very dearly, or she scarcely could have regretted him so much. If she had been questioned as to the real state of her feelings on this point, she could not have given any very clear reply to the question. She only knew that her husband had been very good to her, and that she had repaid his devotion with neglect and indifference. Maude had been a spoiled child, it must be remembered, and there may have been something of a spoiled child's useless remorse in her penitence; but she was very penitent. All her life for the last year had been crowded with proofs of Francis Tredethlyn's unbounded love; and, looking back upon them, she could not remember one instance in which she had been sufficiently grateful for his affection.

"Those silly young men at the Cedars used to make a fool

of me with their empty flatteries," she thought, remorsefully; "and I treated Frank as I had learned to treat them, accepting his generous devotion as indifferently as I had accepted their unmeaning compliments."

There was one thing that Maude did not remember as she looked back at her past life, and that was Harcourt Lowther's influence. She did not know how much of her indifference to her husband had been engendered by the subtle sarcasms of her jilted lover; nor did she know how the schemer had practised upon her girlish love of society, in order to widen the gulf that divided her from Francis Tredethlyn. Her errors as a wife had chiefly arisen from want of leisure. She had found no time to adapt herself to her husband's tastes—no time to elevate and refine him by association—no time to give him any return for those practical proofs of his affection in the way of jewels and carriages, thorough-bred steppers, and hundred-guinea shawls, which he was constantly lavishing upon her; and, worse than all, she had found no time to inquire how he passed his life, or in what circles he sought the happiness she had never tried to provide for him in his home.

"I will ask him to complete the purchase of the Berkshire estate when he comes back to me," she thought; "and then we shall be able to begin a new life away from this perpetual whirlpool of society; and I can drive to the meet when Frank hunts, and even take an interest in the stables. Country stables are so pretty; and it's so nice to see a favourite horse looking over the door of his loose-box, with a big tabby cat sitting on the wooden ledge beside him, and honeysuckle blowing about his head. But one's horses might as well be at the North Pole for all one can see of them in a London mews, where there are always dreadful men in shirt-sleeves, and cross-looking women hanging up clothes," mused Mrs. Tredethlyn, with a vivid recollection of the prospect which all the ground glass in her fernery could not quite shut out.

While she was thinking very penitently of the past, and weaving pleasant schemes for the future; while she was perpetually counting the days which must elapse before Francis returned to her, always supposing that the remorseful words of her letter found their way straight to his heart, as she implicitly believed they would; while she was praying daily and nightly for his safe preservation in tempest and danger, Maude Tredethlyn took up the "Times" newspaper one morning as she loitered listlessly over a lonely breakfast-table, and the first paragraph that met her eyes was the announcement of the *Kingfisher's* total destruction by fire, and the entire loss of passengers and crew.

## CHAPTER XI.

## AN IGNOMINIOUS FAILURE.

HARCOURT LOWTHER had his copy of the great journal on the day when Maude read that horrible paragraph. Roderick had called at Stuccoville during Mrs. Tredethlyn's seclusion, and had heard of the Cornishman's departure, and the name of the vessel he had gone in, from Julia Desmond. The schemer turned deadly pale when his brother read him the brief account of one of those terrible catastrophes which come upon mortal travellers now and then, to teach them how frail is man's hold of that wondrous power by which modern science has learnt to rule the elements. The coolest villain who ever planned a comrade's destruction must surely suffer one sharp pang of remorse when he knows that the hand which has so often clasped his own is really cold. To Harcourt Lowther the wealthy Cornishman had never been anything worse than an impediment. He was gone now; there was little doubt of that. Midway between her starting place and her destination, the *Kingfisher*, sailing gaily on a placid sea, had succumbed to a worse foe than tempest or hurricane, and all on board her had perished. A fragment of charred timber, branded with the name of the steamer, had been picked up by a homeward-bound vessel; and in the calm moonlit night the blazing ship had been seen by distant voyagers a lurid speck upon the silvery horizon. By these and many other tokens the fact of the catastrophe had been made known; and in a hundred British households there was mourning for lost friends and kinsmen.

After the first shock that came upon him with these sudden tidings, Harcourt Lowther gave a long sigh of relief.

"It was the fellow's own doing," he muttered. "If he had not made a quarrel with me, this would never have happened. And he's gone! Poor lad! He was not such a bad fellow, after all. Better to die that way than of delirium tremens," added Mr. Lowther, with a furtive glance towards a tall smoke-coloured bottle which was apt to adorn his table very often nowadays. "And so my Maude is free—at last! Do you know, Roderick, it seems to me as if I had lived twenty years or so since my return from Van Diemen's Land? and now that the luck turns, and the winning colour comes up for the first time, I feel as if I had almost outlived the power to care much about it. Roderick!" cried the invalid, with a sharp suddenness that startled his brother, "did Folson tell you there was any serious damage done to my head by that ugly fall the other

night? I know he has talked to you about me. I heard you and him muttering together yesterday, when I was lying half asleep in the next room."

Mr. Folson was the medical man who had attended Harcourt Lowther after the scuffle with Francis, and who had brought all his science to bear for the preservation of the handsome face without which his patient would have been so small a creature.

"Folson said very little about the damage you got in the row," the *attaché* answered, very coolly; "but he told me you must drop your liberal consumption of that sort of thing, or you'd find yourself very speedily in Queer Street." Mr. Lowther pointed to the smoke-coloured bottle as he thus addressed himself to his invalid brother. "While you were teaching that fellow Tredethlyn to drink himself to death, you ought to have learnt how to keep yourself alive by not drinking," he said presently. "However, I don't want to say anything unpleasant, but you really must cut your very intimate acquaintance with the brandy-bottle, if you want to improve your opportunity, now that Mrs. Tredethlyn is a rich widow. If you don't look sharp I shall throw over the Grunderson, and go in against you."

Harcourt smiled superciliously.

"I am not afraid of *you*, for more reasons than one," he said. "Maude is a curious girl. I sometimes fancy my own chance is not quite so good as it once was. Goethe says that a man wins in his age the prize he sighs for in his youth. Perhaps, when I am a pottering old fellow of seventy, I shall have a great fortune and a handsome wife; only the capability of caring much for either will be gone. How fond we were of toffee at Harrow! But all the toffee that was ever manufactured in Doncaster during the Sellenger week wouldn't give me a ray of pleasure now. Madame de Maintenon began to enjoy herself when she was eighty; rather late in the day, wasn't it? My soul is weary, Roderick; and now the chance *has* come, I'm not the man I was. Perhaps, after all, the simple truth of the matter is that I am suffering from an attack of blue devils, engendered of solitary confinement in this detestable crib. I'll tell you what I'll do, old fellow. As the ugly scar across my forehead has dwindled into a romantic-looking badge of bygone prowess, and the variegated hues of my countenance are rapidly fading into an interesting pallor, I'll get you to send me round a hack from Parsons's, and I'll take a spin in the Park; there won't be many people about at this time of year, and the fresh air will blow my old self back again, I dare say. I'll meet you at the Metropolitan afterwards, if you like," added Harcourt, naming an adjacent restaurant at which the brothers had been wont to dine occasionally.

"No, thanks. I dine at the Grundersons."

"*Déjà!* We go fast, my friend!"

"If your military experience had extended farther than the superintendence of penitent burglars, you might have known that where the assailing party is weak, a fortress must be taken quickly, or not at all. I declared myself to Rosa this morning. She is delighted with the idea of flourishing at foreign courts in *écrasant* pink dresses. How I shall tone her down, poor child! and what a hard time we shall both have of it before the scent of the market-garden ceases to cling to her still! I am to speak to papa Grunderson this evening, over his wine. He consumes the best part of a bottle of old port every night, and finishes off at a neighbouring tavern with the gin-and-water of his early manhood. Rosa tells me that he is an indulgent old party, and that I shall not have any difficulty in bringing him to book."

"Then you really think of marrying?" asked Harcourt, thoughtfully.

"Really think of marrying? Of course I do. What else should I think of whereby to improve my fortunes? And Rosa will not be so *very* disagreeable after a good deal of toning down."

"I thought perhaps you might have some lingering regard for—that other person."

The diplomatist turned upon his brother with a frown.

"I thought I told you that I didn't care to discuss that subject," he said, haughtily. "Drop it, if you please. There are plenty of disagreeable things in *your* life, I dare say, that I might remember, if I wanted to make myself obnoxious. However, as you have been existing upon a limited supply of oxygen for the last six weeks, I suppose you're privileged to be cantankerous. I'll look in at the stables and send you the hack; and if I find you here when I come home to dress, I dare say we shall hit it better. *A bientôt!*"

Harcourt Lowther had his gallop in the Park, and punished the livery-stable hack rather severely. It was dusk before he went back to town, and he left the Park by the Prince's Gate, and rode slowly through the gorgeous desolation of St. Coccoville. He walked his horse down the street in which Francis Tredehlyn's household had been established. Glimmering lights burned feebly in the windows on the second floor, but the gaslit dining-room was blank and empty.

Looking up at the dimly lighted windows, Harcourt Lowther wondered if Maude Tredehlyn's heart, set free all at once from its mercenary bondage, had fluttered back to the lover of her

youth. He was strangely tormented by conflicting fancies, and found it hard to strike the balance between his low estimate of woman's constancy and his very high opinion of his own merits.

"She loved me once," he thought, "and my hold upon her ought to be stronger now than ever it was. I have quires of schoolgirl letters filled with protestations of eternal constancy and reliance in a bright future waiting for us somewhere in the cloudy distance of our lives. And now the happy future is ours, my Maude; you are free and you are rich; so we can afford to build the castle of our dreams, and live in it very respectably."

Riding slowly homeward through the crowded streets, Mr. Lowther found it very difficult to shut out of his mind the picture of a burning ship, and the image of the man whom he had called his friend, prominent amidst a wild night-scene of death and horror.

"I'm glad I had nothing to do with the fellow's going in that vessel," thought Mr. Lowther, as he tried to shake off the uncomfortable feeling which oppressed him. "I had no hand in his mad freak of bolting off to Buenos Ayres; so I needn't worry myself about the business. If he had lived to get there safely, I dare say he'd have been finished off by fever or small-pox."

Nearly a week elapsed before Harcourt Lowther approached the woman who had once been his plighted wife, and who was now free to renew her broken vows as speedily as common decency would allow her to accept the addresses of a second husband. The schemer wanted to be sure of his triumph. One interview with Maude, one look in her face, would be enough to tell him whether his hold on her was undiminished, whether his future happiness was secure. Assured of this, he would be contented to stand apart until the usages of society would permit him to take his place by her side as her acknowledged suitor. But he was eager to be quite sure of his position. A nervous restlessness that was foreign to his temperament had come upon him since the tidings of the *Kingfisher's* destruction had reached his ears; and he could not endure anything like uncertainty or suspense.

He called at Stuccoville one morning. He was told that Mrs. Tredethlyn would see no one; but that Miss Desmond was at home, and would receive him, if he pleased.

He did please; and was ushered into the morning-room, where Julia sat writing at a little table near the window. There was a door opening from Mrs. Tredethlyn's dressing-room into this morning-room; and as Harcourt entered at one door, a pale wan creature in black appeared at the other.

It was Maude—so changed that a sudden pang shot through the schemer's heart as he looked at her; a sudden pang that must have been remorse, but which gave place immediately to a feeling of jealous anger.

Was the loss of her husband so deep a sorrow that it should change her like this?

She had seen the visitor, and was drawing back, when he ran to her and seized her hand.

"Maude!" he cried, passionately, "I must speak to you. Surely you are not going to treat me like a stranger."

She tried to take her hand from his, but he held it firmly and drew her into the room; as he did so, Julia, who had risen on his entrance, went quietly out at the other door. Maude and Harcourt were alone.

"What can you have to say to me?" asked Mrs. Tredethlyn. "It is cruel of you to force yourself upon me at such a time as this. I have grief enough and trouble enough without being tortured by the sight of you."

Harcourt Lowther looked at her aghast.

"Tortured by the sight of me!" he repeated.

"Yes," answered Maude, indignantly. "It was your fault that my husband left me. It was you who planted base suspicions in my mind when there was no need for suspicion. If I had gone back to the cottage at Petersham—as I would have done, but for you—I should have discovered the folly of my jealous fancies—inspired by you—yes, by you alone. For when I saw Francis and his cousin, my first impulse was to call him by his name. It was your exclamation that frightened me; it was your manner that filled me with absurd alarm. Why did you poison my mind against the best husband a woman ever had? How could you be so base as to repay his trusting friendship with such malicious treachery?"

"Because I loved you, Mrs. Tredethlyn, and I believed that your husband had wronged you. Was I likely to be a very lenient judge of his conduct towards you, when I had loved you so passionately, and had been jilted by you so cruelly for him? You questioned me, and I spoke. Can you forget or deny that I spoke reluctantly? You hang your head, Mrs. Tredethlyn; ah, I see that you remember."

"Yes," answered Maude, piteously, as she sank into a chair; "you are right. I made you speak. It was my own jealousy from first to last. If others doubted and suspected, I ought to have trusted him. What a pitiful return I made him for so much devotion, when I could not even give him my confidence!" She was silent for some moments, lost in thought. It was of her husband, and not of the man standing

before her, that she was thinking. Harcourt Lowther could see that.

She looked up at him presently, as if she suddenly remembered his presence. "Have you anything more to say to me?" she asked, coldly.

"Have I anything more to say! Are you mad, Mrs. Tredethlyn, that you ask me such a question? I have outraged propriety perhaps in coming to see you so soon, you will tell me; but a man who has suffered as much as I have at the hands of the woman he loves is not very likely to be held back by ceremonial constraints when the hour comes in which he may claim atonement for the wrong that has been done him. I respect your natural sorrow for the terrible fate of your husband; but I should despise you if you were so false-hearted a prude as to affect forgetfulness of what is due to me."

Maude looked at him as she had never looked at him before. Wonder, indignation, disgust—all mingled in the expression of her countenance. He had woven his network to ensnare a frivolous shallow-hearted girl, and behold, on the completion of the schemer's web, a woman arose in the strength of her truth and purity, and shook herself free from the toils as easily as if they had been so much gossamer. "There is something due from me to you?" she asked, haughtily. "What is it?"

"The fulfilment of your broken promise. I have waited, Maude, and waited patiently. Another man would have revenged himself on your inconstancy by proving to you that he too could be inconstant. Hopeless but patient, I have given you a disinterested devotion which is without a parallel in the history of man's sacrifice for the woman of his choice. Now that you are free, I ask some atonement for the past, some reward for my patience. Tell me that the past is not quite forgotten—that the tender protestations which consoled me in my miserable exile were not utterly meaningless and false. Why do you look at me like that? Have I been the dupe of a coquette from first to last, Mrs. Tredethlyn, and does your husband's death only leave you free to jilt me again? Have I been fooled to the top of my bent by a woman who has never loved me?"

"No, Mr. Lowther," Maude answered, very quietly; "I did love you once. I look back now, and wonder at myself as I remember how dearly. But my love died—a very sudden death."

"When you discovered the advantages of a wealthy marriage for the penniless daughter of a commercial defaulter," cried Harcourt.

"No; my love for you was a girlish fancy, if you like;

though Heaven only knows how deeply I felt for you in your exile—how willing I would have been to resign my imaginary wealth for love of you, if you had asked me to do so. But you never did ask that. You did not want the wife without the fortune. When you came home and found me engaged to another man—about to sacrifice myself in a mercenary marriage, as you thought—there was yet time to have exacted the fulfilment of my promise. I loved you then, Harcourt Lowther. A word from you, and I would have told Francis Tredethlyn the truth, and demanded my release. He was far too generous to have withheld it. But in doing that I should have offended my father, and I should have come to you penniless. You did not want me on those terms, Harcourt. The honest indignation of a disinterested lover never found an utterance on your lips. You were contented to assume the position of friend and confidant to your unconscious rival; and it is only since I have been left alone to think of my past life, that I have fully understood the dishonour involved in keeping our broken engagement a secret from my husband. I loved you when you came back to England, Harcourt. It was a hard battle which duty had to fight against the unaltered affection of my girlhood. I prayed to God night and day for strength to do my duty, and to keep my promise to the man who had a claim upon me, which you have never known. I prayed for power to blot your image from my mind; and my prayer was heard. My first foolish love died on my wedding-day, Harcourt, when you stood by to see me married to Francis Tredethlyn. From that hour to this you have been no more to me than any other man who has paid me the conventional attentions which I imagined I had a right to receive. If I had ever seen more than this in your conduct, Mr. Lowther, you would have found me quite capable of asserting my position."

"The world has chosen to see a good deal more than conventional courtesy in my attendance upon you, Mrs. Tredethlyn," answered Harcourt. He had lost the game. Utterly defeated in the moment of his expected triumph, he was careless as to the rest of his play. How can the whist-player, who knows that he is beaten, be expected to pay any great attention to the order in which he plays the two or three insignificant cards that he holds at the close of the rubber? "People have been good enough to make us the subject of considerable discussion, Mrs. Tredethlyn," continued Harcourt. "A man is apt to hear these things, though they rarely reach the ears of the lady most interested in hearing them. The people amongst whom we live have made up their minds about us, I know, and will be considerably astonished if you throw me over now that you are free

to reward the patient devotion which has endured so much in the hope of this hour."

He saw Maude's look of unutterable scorn; a look which revealed her to him in a new and higher light, and inspired him with a more passionate love than he had ever felt for her yet—and at his worst he had loved her.

"Maude," he cried, in a sudden access of mingled rage and despair, "why do you goad me to say these things? I know now detestable I seem to you. And yet, as there is a heaven above me, I have loved you truly from first to last. Pity me if, while I prayed for no better fate than to face the enemy's guns on an Indian battle-field, I was a coward in social life and dared not brave genteel poverty even for your sake. Pity me if I shrank from thrusting myself between you and a wealthy marriage. I had been poor all my life; and I knew what you have never learnt—the horrors of a gentleman's poverty. I have smiled at your girlish talk of pretty cottages and tiny suburban gardens; an elegant little drawing-room, in which you and I might spend the winter evenings together with our books and music. The poor gentleman's cottage is never pretty; the poor gentleman's drawing-room is never elegant. His wife's tastes may be ever so simple, his own aspirations may be ever so pure; but poverty countenances no taste, permits no aspiration. His wife is fond of music, perhaps. Heaven help her! she cannot be sure of an hour in which her piano may not be seized by the broker. She delights in flowers; but the nosegays she arranges so gaily to-day may entail a writ for the florist's account to-morrow. You would have thought me a model of all that is noble and disinterested if I had exposed you to such miseries as these: you think me a scoundrel because I was not selfish enough to say to you, 'Reject Francis Tredethlyn and a life of elegant ease, and accept my devotion and an existence of penury and trouble.'"

"And you ask me now to fulfil my broken promise? Have you inherited a fortune? or how is it that your ideas upon matrimony have altered?"

The schemer flushed crimson to the roots of his hair, and then grew deadly pale. For the life of him he could not answer that question. He could not say, "*My* position is unchanged, but *you* are rich. Give me your fortune and the heart I did not choose to claim when it was unaccompanied by fortune."

"Had we not better wish each other good morning, Mr. Lowther?" Maude said, after a little pause. "Your visit is ill-timed and most unwelcome. Your presence reminds me of a cruel wrong done to a noble friend, a devoted husband, whose worth I have learned only too late; whom I have loved unconsciously,

only to discover the depth of my affection when its object is lost to me for ever."

" You loved your husband!" cried Harcourt, with a cynical laugh; " you seem determined to astonish me to-day. You loved your husband?"

" Yes—dearly and truly; and love his memory better than ever I loved you. I have learned to think, since I have been released from your influence; for it was your influence that regulated my life as well as my husband's; it was your influence that kept us asunder, and plunged both of us into a whirlpool of dissipation. I have had time to think during the long miserable days and nights in which I have watched for the coming of him who was never to return to me; and if I had not discovered the shallowness of your love before my marriage, I should have made that discovery since. You are base enough to tell me that the world has linked my name with yours. I can afford to despise a world in which I have never found real happiness, and in which I no longer wish to hold a place. I shall go back to my father's house, and my life will be one long atonement for the past. I tell you this, Mr. Lowther, in order that you may understand that we must be strangers to each other henceforward."

She laid her hand upon the bell as she spoke. Harcourt Lowther stood for some moments looking at her. A strange compound of passionate admiration and vengeful fury flamed in his eyes.

" I have sometimes wondered at the madmen who murder the women they have loved; but God help you, Maude Tredethlyn, if I had a loaded pistol in my pocket to-day!"

He folded his arms, locking them together with a convulsive suddenness, as if he could only thus restrain the impulse by which he would have struck her down where she stood defying him; and then he turned, and slowly left the room.

He had left his hired horse in the quiet street, in charge of a boy; but the boy's back was turned when his employer left the house, and Harcourt Lowther drove back to town in a hansom. It was only when his brother reminded him of the horse, that he remembered how he had gone to Stuccoville; and sent a man to recover the missing steed. After that he left the noisy regions of the Strand, and wandered across one of the bridges out to some dismal waste ground in the neighbourhood of Battersea; a remote and forgotten tract, that was almost as lonely as an African desert: there he laid himself down amongst the rubbish of a deserted brickfield, and cried like a child.

## CHAPTER XLI.

## SUSAN'S GOOD NEWS.

MAUDE TREDETHLYN sat alone in her spacious chamber: oh, so spacious, so splendid, so dreary, so ghastly, with a tall carved walnut-wood bedstead that was like one of the tombs in Père la Chaise, only not so lively, and with long panels of looking-glass shimmering ghost-like in dark walnut-wood wardrobes and armoires, and *duchesse* dressing-tables. She might have endured her troubles better, perhaps, if her room had been furnished with white and gold rather than so much funereal walnut-wood and ghastly looking-glass. She sat alone, thinking of the husband whom she had lost, and whose worth she had only discovered when it was too late. She would accept sympathy from no one. Julia wrote her letters, and saw people who must be seen, and was very good; but the wayward heart shrank away from her in its sudden desolation. She had loved him—she had loved him—and had been ashamed to confess her real feelings either to herself or to the people who had smiled upon a mercenary marriage as if it was the most natural thing under heaven; but who would have lifted their eyebrows in scornful surprise had they known that she could care for a person whose boyhood had been spent in a humble old home-stead among the Cornish moorlands. Gliding gracefully through her frivolous life, tolerably happy in a shallow kind of way, with more shopping, and driving, and riding, and calling, and kettle-drumming, and dinner-giving, and horticultural-fête attending, always to be done than it was in the power of any one woman to do, except by a perpetual scramble, she had found no time to consider her position, no time to be aware how entirely even her most frivolous pleasures depended on the faithful minister whom no influence could entirely divide from her.

Amongst the papers she had looked over on the library shelves and tables, where the dust lay thick, she had sometimes found a sheet of perfumed note-paper, and a list of items in her own writing—commissions she had given Francis to execute, troublesome ones sometimes, involving loss of time, and patient inquiry amongst West-end emporiums—orders for new books, drawing materials, ferns, music, all the frivolities of her life. She remembered with a cruel pang of remorse how faithfully the smallest details had been remembered, how patiently the most tiresome researches had been conducted, and how very lightly all this untiring service had been accepted. Circumstances which she had been too thoughtless to notice at the time flashed back upon her now, and she remembered how

Harcourt Lowther had stepped between her and her husband even in this commonplace communion—how Francis had been pushed aside, politely taught to remember what an ignorant and awkward creature he was when compared to the fine gentleman.

As she sat alone, upon the evening after her interview with Harcourt Lowther, her husband's image was more vividly present with her than it had been at any moment since his departure. The bright honest face—the faithful loving face—shone out upon her in the ghastly twilight of her ghastly chamber, and she thought how pleasant it would have been to be sitting opposite her husband in the firelight glow of a cosy parlour, far away from splendid loneliness and carved walnut-wood. She thought of him with her face hidden in her hands, and her aching head lying wearily on the sofa-cushion. She thought of him until a nervous restlessness came upon her, and she sprang suddenly to her feet, unable to bear the oppression of that dreary room, or any room in that dreary house.

"I must go away somewhere, or I shall die," she thought; "this place seems haunted. I will go to papa. He is very good to me, but he does not understand what I feel about Francis. People speak so lightly of him, and seem to have known him so little. If I could talk to any one who really loved him; if I could talk to any one who knew his goodness as I ought to have known it—as I do know it, now that he is dead!"

She crossed the room hurriedly, and rang the bell. She had told her maid to bring lights only when she rang for them, much to the dismay of that sympathetic young person, who believed that candle-light and company were eminently consolatory in all earthly sorrows. When the candles came, Maude went to a writing-table, and wrote a few hasty lines to her husband's simple little cousin. She had written to Susan once before, to tell her of Francis Tredethlyn's departure; but the two women had not seen each other since their first meeting.

"MY DEAR SUSAN,—There is terrible news of your cousin: it may have reached you before this, perhaps. Will you come to me? I am so utterly miserable! and I believe that you are the only person in the world who can understand my sorrow. Come, dear, I implore you. Ever your affectionate

"MAUDE."

Mrs. Tredethlyn was a great deal too impatient to wait for any such commonplace means of communication as the post. She summoned her maid, and entrusted her letter to that faithful attendant, with directions that a groom should mount one of the Park hacks immediately, and ride straight to Petersham

with the missive. The maid obeyed; and the groom, who had made an engagement to go half-price to a West-end theatre, departed, grumbling sulkily, and determined on punishing the Park hack for the unwarrantable caprice of his mistress.

Maude slept soundly that night for the first time since the tidings of the *Kingfisher's* fate had reached her, and woke in the morning to see Susan looking down at her with a smile upon her face.

"Ah, you don't know," cried Maude, waking out of a happy dream to an instant consciousness of her sorrow,—"you don't know what has happened: you haven't heard?"

"Of what, dear?" Susan asked, gently, as Maude started up from amongst her pillows feverish and excited.

"The loss of the *Kingfisher*—the fire—the dreadful fire! Oh, Susan, you *cannot* have heard!"

Mrs. Tredethlyn said this, because the girl's face, though it was grave and sad, expressed none of that acute anguish which Susan ought to have felt for her cousin's untimely fate. She only looked at Maude with a wondering earnestness.

"Yes, it was very dreadful," she said. "Mrs. Clinnock read it in the paper, and told me. I am so sorry for all the sufferers. But oh, Maude, dear cousin, how grateful we ought to be for the accident that saved Francis from such a fate! If he had gone by that vessel, dear——"

She stopped suddenly, for Maude looked at her with an unnatural stare, and then fell back unconscious.

No, he had not perished with the ill-fated passengers of the *Kingfisher*. Lives as noble, friends as dear, husbands and fathers, brothers and sons, worth and genius, some tribute from all that is brightest upon earth,—had gone down to the deep waters; but Francis Tredethlyn had not made a part in the mighty sacrifice. When Maude recovered from the deadly faintness that had come upon her, Susan showed her a letter which she had received from her cousin,—a letter that had been written in an hotel at Plymouth *after* the sailing of the *Kingfisher*. It was a kind kinsmanlike letter, stating the arrangements which the writer had made for the comfort and welfare of his cousin and her child; and, in conclusion, Francis told Susan that he had reached Plymouth too late to leave by the *Kingfisher*, a steamer which he had intended to go by, and in which he had taken his berth. Thus left with his time on his hands for some days, he had resolved on going to have a look at the old neighbourhood once more.

"It might seem a foolish fancy to many people, but I don't think it will to you, Susy," he wrote. "I want to gather a

handful of daisies from my mother's grave before I leave the soil that holds her for ever. I want to stand by the old hearth once more, though God knows what a pain it will be to me to see strangers in the old home. God bless you, dear, and good-bye! I shall not write again till I write from the New World."

This was the close of the letter, which Susan gave Maude to read. Her first feeling on reading it was unbounded gratitude to the Providence that had saved Francis Tredethlyn. Her second feeling was considerable indignation against Francis himself. The mother of the comic song who bewails her missing child in such pathetic numbers, and slaps him soundly when she finds him, is not such a very impossible character.

"It was shameful of him to let me suffer so much," she cried, "when a few lines from him would have made me so happy;" and then she was grateful to Providence again, and angry with herself for having been angry with Francis; and then she pounced upon Susan and kissed her.

"What am I to do, darling?" she asked. "I dare say he has gone off by some other horrible steamer. But wherever he is, I won't stop idle in this dreary house. I won't trust everything to that slow solemn lawyer. I'll go to Cornwall myself, Susy, and find out all about my husband; how long he stayed there, and when he left. You'll tell me where to go; won't you, Susy?"

Of course Susan was ready to give her cousin's wife all needful information about that forgotten corner of the earth, Lancashire. She would have volunteered to accompany Maude to the western moors, only there was the boy; and Susan had an idea that if she were to turn her back upon her son for twenty-four consecutive hours, he would inevitably be seized with measles or scarlatina in her absence. But Maude declared she wanted no one to accompany her.

"I suppose I must take my maid," she said; "but I shall leave her at the inn at Falmouth, and go alone to that queer old house on the moor, and those queer old people Francis once told me about."

Julia Desmond had to endure a good deal that morning, for Maude was radiant when she appeared with Susan at the breakfast-table. She was so grateful to Susan for hurrying to her in the early morning.

"Every night, when I have gone to sleep, I have thought the same thing," she said: "if I could only wake and find it all a dream—if I could wake to find it only a dream! And this morning I did wake to find an angel standing by my bed with the best news I ever heard in all my life. But I am very sorry for those poor people who were really lost in the *Kingfisher*,"

added Maude, mournfully; she felt that there was something almost incongruous in her own happiness when so many must be sorrowful for the destruction of that ill-fated vessel.

While she was making preparations for her departure, Mr. Kursdale, the solicitor, was announced. He came radiant and red-faced to tell her the result of inquiries which he had considered it expedient to have made at Plymouth before taking any legal steps with regard to the supposed demise of his respected client; and the result was that Francis had not sailed in the *Kingfisher*; and he was very proud and happy to announce to Mrs. Tredethlyn—

He would have gone on in a ponderous manner for some time longer, if Maude had not interrupted him by the assurance that she knew all about it.

"You did not ascertain that my husband had left Plymouth by any other vessel?" she asked.

"No."

"Then we may hope he is still in England. I am going to Cornwall immediately to look for him. At the worst, I shall there hear all about him."

Mr. Kursdale evidently thought this very unprofessional, and suggested the expediency of a clerk acting as Mrs. Tredethlyn's proxy; but Maude shook her head.

"I will go myself," she said. "If my husband is still in England, I will find him. There can be no further misunderstanding between us, if once we can meet face to face."

Mr. Kursdale submitted, and departed. Maude ran away to superintend her maid's packing of a small portmanteau, and Susan sat in the morning-room with Julia. It had been settled that Miss Desmond should drive her back to Petersham after luncheon.

They were talking rather ceremoniously, when the door was suddenly opened by an impetuous hand, and Miss Grunderson burst in upon them, more intensely pink than usual.

"They wanted me to go to the drawing-room, and they'd go and see if Mrs. Tredethlyn was at home!" exclaimed Rosa. "I know what their going and seeing is. Not at home always, and I do so want to see that poor darling; and I'm sure there's no one in the world more truly sorry for her than I am; and if going into half-mourning would have been considered a tribute of sincere respect, and not an intrusion or uncalled for, I would have ordered a crape bonnet, trimmed with lilies of the valley and jet beads, directly I heard of it."

Julia interrupted Miss Grunderson with a simple statement of the fact which had put an end to Maude's brief time of mourning. Rosa's delight was very genuine, and on being introduced

to Mrs. Lesley, she expanded as it was her wont to expand on all occasions.

"You can't think how glad I am!" she exclaimed; "for I assure you when I heard of that *dreadful* event, I felt as if it was quite hard-hearted of me to be happy, and I have been very happy for the last week or so. In point of fact," added Miss Grunderson, dragging at the button of a very tight glove in evident embarrassment, "I'm engaged to be married."

"Indeed!" said Julia, politely.

"Yes. You see as par has long objected to my running after public characters, which of course was tiresome to him,—for of all the people to tear about to all sorts of inaccessible places, and oblige one's getting up unreasonably early in the morning to hear them or to see them, public characters are the worst,—so par was really glad for me to be seriously engaged to anybody that would keep me quiet, he said, even if the person was not rich; so when Mr. Lowther—Mr. Roderick Lowther, you know—proposed, par happening to be in a good temper, it was all settled immediately."

"I am very glad to hear it," answered Miss Desmond; "but I am not at all surprised. I quite expected as much."

"Did you really, now? Well, upon my word, I thought at first he was almost as grumpy as Rochester in '*Jane Eyre*'; but when those grumpy people do begin to pay one compliments, it is so nice. Of course, with regard to Mario, Lord Palmerston, Sir Edwin Landseer, and Charles Mathews, my feelings will be unchanged to my dying day. But the worship of public characters need not interfere with the happiness of domestic life; and as Roderick's position in the *corps diplomatique* will take us abroad, his jealousy need never be aroused in the slightest degree."

Miss Grunderson entertained the two ladies for some time with minute details of her own affairs, and she confessed presently that Roderick had promised to call for her.

"He doesn't want to see Mrs. Tredethlyn, you know," she said; "he was only anxious to express to you how sorry he is, and so on—though, of course, now he hasn't any occasion to be sorry, thank goodness!—but you don't mind his coming to fetch me, do you, dear? The carriage is waiting for me, and I'm going to take him on to the Haymarket, where we're to see about the resetting of some old-fashioned diamond earrings that Roderick's ma has sent me. They're not nearly as handsome as my own, you know; but, of course, I feel grateful to her for the attention. And I'm to go down to Lowther Hall to stay before our marriage; and I'm to be introduced to a maiden aunt of Roderick's, from whom he has expectations, this very

afternoon—I mean I'm to be introduced to her this very afternoon," added Rosa.

While she was chattering the door was opened, and a servant announced Mr. Lowther. He came out of the bright white daylight on the staircase into the room which was kept cool and shadowy by closed Venetian shutters. As he looked about him, unaccustomed to the obscurity, he heard a faint shriek, and a woman who had been sitting with her back to the window started suddenly from her chair.

"Robert!" she cried; "Robert, is it you?" And then she sank down again, pale and breathless.

"Robert!" exclaimed Miss Grunderson; "you must mistake Mr. Lowther for some one else, Mrs. Lesley. His name is not Robert."

"Perhaps not," Susan answered, sadly. "He kept his real name a secret from the poor girl who was once proud to call herself his wife; but whatever his name may be he is my husband nevertheless, and Providence has brought about our meeting to-day. Oh, don't add a falsehood to the wrong you have done me!" she cried, appealing to Roderick Lowther, who stood pale and confounded, with the faces of the three women all turned towards him, and with the knowledge that those scrutinizing eyes were upon him. "I shall claim very little of you. I only want you to give me the name I have a right to bear; I only want you to acknowledge your son."

Roderick Lowther did not reply to this appeal. After a moment's pause he turned to Julia:

"Where do you pick up your acquaintance, Miss Desmond?" he said. "I should scarcely have expected to meet this lady here."

"This lady is my husband's cousin," answered Maude, who had entered the room while he was speaking; "and I do not know any one who has a better right to be here. What is the matter, Susy darling?"

Roderick Lowther's heart was stirred faintly by the sound of that familiar name—the name which he had whispered so often beside a grey wintry sea, under a wintry sky, in the desolate region which had been brightened for him by his discarded wife's innocence and love.

"There is nothing that can be spoken of here," Susan answered; "I have met some one whom I never expected to see again. I will wait till my cousin comes back. I will say no more till then."

"But, good gracious me!" exclaimed Miss Grunderson, "I'm not going to be treated in this sort of way. What does it all mean, Roderick? That lady starts up all of a sudden, and

calls you her husband, and then says she'll wait till her cousin comes home. I can't be expected to wait till her cousin comes home. I can't take matters so coolly. With my trousseau ordered, and all! I must and will have an explanation!"

" You shall, Rosa; but, for mercy's sake, hold your tongue. There is some infernal mistake. You had better go home; never mind about the earrings to-day. If this lady mistakes me for some one she knows, or has a claim upon, I have no doubt I shall be able to demonstrate her mistake, if I can talk to her for a few minutes quietly. And now let me take you to your carriage, Rosa."

Miss Grunderson would have resisted such a summary way of disposing of her and her wrongs; but Roderick Lowther was firm. He led her down-stairs, and he put her into her carriage, and he sent her home as coolly as if she had been a packet of dry goods consigned to his temporary care, to be sent on to Mr. Grunderson.

" Awkward," he muttered, as he went back to the house; " but things always do happen awkwardly just when a fellow fancies he's swimming with the tide all in his favour."

He looked very grave as he went to Mrs. Tredethlyn's morning-room to demand an interview with Susan; but he looked a great deal more grave as he left the house after that interview and made his way back to his brother's lodgings.

He found Harcourt sitting moodily by the empty fireplace, the slim foreign bottle on the table by his side, and a cigar in his mouth.

" What is the matter with you?" asked the younger brother, listlessly, as he perceived the scowl upon his senior's face.

" There is this much the matter with me," answered Roderick; " I trusted a fellow to help me in a delicate business, and I've reason to think that he took advantage of my confidence to get me into a dilemma that it will take me all my life to get out of. I have seen Susan Turner to-day."

" Indeed!"

" And she has told me something about the Registrar—something that I can scarcely bring myself to believe. Do you remember what I asked you to do for me, Harcourt?"

" Perfectly. And I have got the letter containing your request in my possession—such a nice letter! You tell me in it that you have fallen over head and ears in love with an innocent little country girl, too poor and insignificant to be your wife, too virtuous to be your mistress. Another man might have accepted his fate, and either resigned the lady, or made some sacrifice of his own interests and married her. You were inclined to do neither, and you fell back upon a villainous

expedient familiar to the readers of old-fashioned novels, and known as a mock marriage. You wrote to me about this in a half-playful tone, as if it were the simplest thing in the world—an elegant little comedy, out of which it would be your care, of course, to see that no harm should arise; and so on. The carrying out of the little conspiracy would be very easy. You suggested how it might be done. I had only to engage some clever scamp to enact the Registrar; hire a parlour in some obscure street *near* a District Registrar's Office—in the same street, if practicable; the ceremony would only occupy about ten minutes, and could be got over as quietly as the most commonplace morning call, if the fellow engaged to personate the Registrar knew what he was about. The dear little girl was the last person in the world to suspect anything amiss. In short, it was the simplest possible business, and all our dear good Harcourt had to do was to find the handy scamp who would act the official, and get himself well up in the little professional formula of signing and counter-signing, and so on, in some big books that he would get for the purpose. The certificate business would have to be finessed of course. The dear little girl would ask for no certificate, and the dear little girl's witnesses must be conveniently shut up if they made their noses unpleasantly prominent."

"I begin to understand you," said Roderick, with suppressed fury. "You have sold me; and you are going to defend yourself upon high grounds, conscientious scruples; and so on. Pray proceed. That sort of talk will sound so well from your lips."

"I am not going to do anything of the kind. I am only going to remind you that, as you never in your life did a generous thing for me, or stepped aside from your own interest or your own pleasure by so much as a hair's breadth to serve me, it wasn't very likely that I should get myself into a legal hobble—that mock marriage would have been something like felony, I should imagine—and inflict a cruel wrong upon an innocent little girl to oblige you. I didn't want to be too obliging, so I arranged a marriage, but it was a real and not a sham one; and you are as tightly tied to your pretty little wife as if the business had been transacted at St. George's, Hanover Square, by a popular bishop, assisted by an aristocratic uncle to the bride."

"You are a remorseless scoundrel!" exclaimed Mr. Lowther, coolly. "And I am very happy to tell you that your own pretty little plans are knocked on the head. Francis Tredsthlyn did not sail in the *Kingfisher!*"

Harcourt gave a little start of surprise; but his countenance

did not express the profound vexation and disappointment that his brother had expected to see in it. The schemer had failed so completely, that it mattered very little to him now what course events took.

"Yes, Francis Tredethlyn is alive and well, I have no doubt," resumed Roderick. "And my little Susy turns out to be Francis Tredethlyn's first cousin. I have a recollection of her telling me, after our marriage, that her real name was something outlandish, of a Cornish character; but the name had slipped my memory completely before I met your wealthy Cornishman."

"Then the likeness which I fancied I saw in that daub of a portrait and the similarity of name were not mere coincidences, after all," muttered Harcourt. "And the lady at Petersham is my little sister-in-law. It's a pity you didn't treat her rather better," he added; "for Francis Tredethlyn could afford to give her a handsome fortune, if he pleased. It is from her father he inherits his money; and if you had declared your marriage, and made things square with the old man, your wife need not have been disinherited, and would have been as rich a prize as any Miss Grunderson."

"Hold your tongue!" cried Roderick; "I know what I have lost as well as you do. If you had been above-board with me, and told me that you had sold me about the marriage, I might have acted differently. Why did you get me into such a mess?"

"Because I didn't choose to be your cat-spow. I have been sacrificed to your interests all my life, and I was determined to keep my hold upon you when I had got it."

"And you would have allowed me to marry Rosa Grunderson?"

"*C'est selon!* I think I should have spoken at the last moment—and yet it might have been very convenient to hold an awkward little secret about one's wealthy brother. A man must be very hard up before he descends to that undignified mode of livelihood which the French galley-slaves call *chantage*; but when a fellow is hard up there's no knowing how low he may descend."

"You are a scoundrel!"

"And you are—I can't finish the sentence without sinking to slang. We resemble each other in character as we do in person."

In this fashion the brothers bandied civilities for some time; but they ended matters by dining together at the Metropolitan. Arabian traditions as to the sanctity of bread and salt cannot hold good against the exigencies of civilized life; and men may dine together in a friendly way, and reserve the right of hating each other nevertheless.

Warmed by a good dinner and a bottle of Moselle, Roderick grew hopeful as to the future. Susan would relent from her calm determination never to hold any communication with the husband she had loved so tenderly, by whom she had been so cruelly abandoned. Francis might act in a handsome manner about the fortune which ought to have been his cousin's; and, after all, the turn which affairs had taken might not be altogether an unlucky one.

"Looking at it in any way, Rosa was a nuisance," said Mr. Lowther, as he bedewed his moustache with the rose-water which the luxurious Metropolitan provides for its guests; "and perhaps it's better as it is. We hadn't come to close quarters about the settlements; and I dare say if the *père* Grunderson had been brought to the scratch, we should have had a scuffle."

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## CHAPTER XLII.

### A PERFECT UNION.

MAUDE left Paddington by an afternoon express, and reached Exeter after a journey that was long and wearisome even to a modern traveller, for whom the way has been smoothed so delightfully. It was late the next evening when she reached Falmouth, after a day in a stage-coach, and put up at the principal hotel with her maid, who was a good deal more tired than her mistress, as it is in the nature of maids to be. The coach that passed through Landresdale on its way to some still more remote and savage district left Falmouth early in the morning; and Maude left with it, this time unattended by her maid, whose curiosity had been considerably stimulated by the erratic nature of her mistress's movements, and who thought it a hard thing to be left alone to look out of the window of the hotel sitting-room, while Mrs. Tredethlyn pursued her mysterious journey to its mysterious close.

How strange and new all the wild Cornish scenery seemed to Maude, as she sat alone in the interior of the coach, which was not affected by the sturdy agriculturists and miners who were generally the only passengers on this route! How many conflicting hopes and fears found a place in her mind as she looked out at the unknown country amidst which her husband's boyhood had been spent! Had he sailed for the New World by some later vessel than the *Kingfisher*? Was he far away from the rustic homestead towards which she was travelling with a faint hope of finding him at the end of her journey?—an unreasoning hope, which she tried to shut out of her mind in her dread of the cruel disappointment that might await her.

The coach put her down before the Crown Inn, and she stood alone in Landresdale High Street, with the great gates of the marquis's enchanted castle frowning down upon her from the top of the hill. She inquired about a conveyance to take her on to Tredethlyn Grange; and the landlord of the Crown ordered the immediate preparation of a lumbering old equipage of a tub-like character, lined with washed-out chintz, which was brought forth on rare occasions, and charged for at a prodigious rate. While the equipage was being prepared, the landlord contemplated his bright young visitor with evident curiosity, and would fain have beguiled her into conversation; but Maude had no inclination to be communicative. If she was to receive a death-blow to all her hopes, she did not want to take it from the hands of this coarse common man. She wanted to go straight to the Grange and learn her fate there, and there only. The road from Landresdale to the moorland farmhouse was longer than the by-path through the churchyard by which Francis had gone; and the clumsy old brown horse, and the lumbering vehicle in which Maude was seated, progressed very slowly. The way seemed intolerably long to her; but at last she saw a grey spot against the blue sky, and made out that the vehicle was bearing towards it by a winding track along which heavy waggons had left the impression of their broad wheels. The grey spot grew bigger and bigger against the horizon, until it grew at last into a dreary-looking habitation, with quaint old gables and moss-grown stone walls. One slender thread of smoke curled upward, white against the clear blue atmosphere; some sheep were grazing upon the patch of ground that had once been a garden; and the perfume of the clover blew towards the traveller as the fly lumbered nearer to the broken gate.

Maude looked hopelessly at the quiet house,—so little sign of occupation, so little token of life.

"He can't be there," she thought; a sudden gush of tears shutting out the grey stone walls, the clover-field and browsing sheep. "I am too late!"

She brushed away her tears, drew down her veil, and alighted, telling the driver to wait for her; whereupon the man took the bit out of his horse's mouth and abandoned himself to slumber, while the animal cropped the stunted grass contentedly. Some sheep that had been lying in the pathway skipped awkwardly away as Maude crossed the bare enclosure; and as she approached the door, it was opened by a tall gaunt woman, who had evidently been disturbed by the unwonted sound of wheels on the rough moorland road.

"Mr. Tredethlyn has been staying here, has he not?" Maude asked, eagerly.

"Yes, ma'am; and he's here still. Excuse me for being a little put out like, but you have taken me so aback. You don't happen to be my master's wife, do you?"

"Yes, yes! Oh, thank Heaven, he is still here! Let me see him at once, please!" exclaimed Maude, trying to pass the grim-looking woman who barred her passage.

"Not yet! Oh, please, ma'am, not yet!" cried the woman, eagerly. "It mightn't be safe."

"Not safe! What do you mean?"

"He has been so ill, ma'am; and the doctor's special orders was that he was to be kept from anything that might upset him. And he talked and raved so about you, poor dear, when his senses were quite gone, as they were for days together; and I'm sure nothing could upset him so much as the sight of your coming upon him sudden. Let me see him first, and tell him you are here. I make no doubt he'll be overjoyed to see you; but it mustn't come like a shock upon him."

"He has been ill!" cried Maude; "dangerously ill!"

"Yes, ma'am; very dangerously. We had two doctors with him at one time. Brain fever it was; over-fatigue and trouble of the mind, and so on, the doctors said. He came up here after being too late for the steamer by which he was to have gone abroad; and he came to settle everything about the farm and the quarries, and so on; and he worked at it night and day, without rest nor sleep, though me and my husband told him how bad it was for him; and everything was almost settled when he woke one morning bad in his head, and after that got from bad to worse, until his life was almost give up."

"But he is out of danger now?"

"Yes, ma'am, thank God, quite out of danger now; but, oh, so weak; the smallest child that ever I had to do with wasn't weaker than my poor master now."

Maude burst out crying. Until this moment she had stood, pale and breathless, waiting to hear that she was indeed too late—that Francis Tredethlyn had escaped the destruction of the *Kingfisher* only to find death waiting for him in his own home.

"Don't mind me," she exclaimed, as the gaunt woman made a clumsy attempt to comfort her; "I am crying for joy. Go and tell my husband that I am here; but not at any hazard to him. I will be very patient. Thank God I have found him! thank God I shall be able to fall on my knees by his bed-side and beg his forgiveness for my neglect and ingratitude!"

Martha Dryscoll looked wonderingly at this butterfly creature, who talked hysterically of falling at her husband's feet and begging forgiveness. Francis had made no confidants in that

Cornish house; and Mrs. Dryscoll began to fear that his marriage had been a very unfortunate affair, and that this sudden arrival of an elegantly dressed penitent was to be the last act of a domestic tragedy.

"If you'll walk in there, ma'am," Martha said, pointing to the parlour, with a severe aspect of countenance, "I'll go and see my master."

She said no more, but departed; and Maude crept into the old-fashioned room, fearful lest the rustling of her silk dress might disturb an invalid's slumber. It seemed a long time that she waited, and then Mrs. Dryscoll returned, smiling grimly this time.

"He'll see you directly minute," she said; "and, oh, he does seem so pleased, poor dear!"

She led Maude to the top of the staircase, and then pointed to a half-open door at the end of a dusky corridor, after which she went down-stairs again, and Maude heard her sobbing quietly to herself until the sound subsided in the distance.

The young wife went on to the half-open door, and entered the room in which her husband lay on a white-curtained bed, very pale, very wan, and so weak that he could not raise his hand to offer it her in token of loving reconciliation.

She fell on her knees by the bed, and laid her cheek upon the hand that was too feeble to be lifted.

"Oh, forgive me!" she said; "my dear, my love, my true and cherished husband! If you wanted to give me a lesson, you have given me a very cruel one; but you have taught me that I cannot live without you."

She sat by his pillow, with his weak head encircled by her caressing arms, and told him the story of her penitence and remorse. It was a sweet exchange of forgiveness for the past, and tender promises for the future. No denizens of Stuccoville kept watch from behind pink curtains; the driver of the fly slumbered as profoundly as one of the seven sleepers; the rustic sound of the sheep cropping the clover was the only sound that stirred the drowsy stillness. Martha kept herself discreetly out of the way; and the husband and wife, truly united for the first time in their lives in that Cornish solitude, were loath to break the spell which held them in such loving union.

But such spells have to be broken for the common business of life. Punctual to the appointed moment Mrs. Dryscoll appeared with her master's medicine; and then the lumbering fly was sent back empty to Landresdale; and after that Mrs. Tredethlyn was banished from the sick room, and made some faint show of taking a little of the refreshment which had been provided for her by Martha.

After dinner she wrote two brief notes—one to her maid at Falmouth, who was to follow her immediately with the portmanteau; the other to Julia, who was to be so good as to send her such luggage as would be necessary to her in a stay of some weeks.

After this Mrs. Tredethlyn had no more to do but to nurse her husband through the slow stages of convalescence. It was very long before he was strong enough to get up to a little Arcadian tea-drinking. It was very long after that before he was able to take a few turns in the clover-field, leaning on Maude's arm. It was still longer before he was well enough to think of turning his back upon Cornwall, to plunge into busy commonplace life again.

If he could have been an invalid for the rest of his days, he would have resigned himself uncomplainingly to his fate; for what period of his chequered existence had been so sweet as this, in which he and Maude were all in all to each other?—this perpetual *tête-à-tête*, unbroken by the intrusion of morning callers, undisturbed by the conflicting emotions which attend social intercourse in high latitudes. And they were not idle either during these autumn months. Hidden among those wild Cornish moors, the husband and wife were very busy together—*improving their minds*; for Maude had confessed to her husband, with a good deal of girlish giggling and blushing, that her own education had been very nearly as defective as his, and that the wide fields of knowledge, which were such strange and bewildering regions to him, were scarcely more familiar to her.

"And you are so clever, Frank," she exclaimed, in conclusion—she always called him Frank now. "You remember what those American phrenologists—Messrs. Somebody and Something—said about your perceptive faculties? You could learn anything, they said. And we'll learn together, dear; for I'm ashamed to say I've forgotten everything my governesses and masters taught me, except French and music, and a smattering of German and Italian. And I'm sure if you'd seen how, as soon as one master had beaten anything into my brains, another master came and beat it out again with something else, you'd scarcely wonder that I'm ignorant. So we'll begin together, Frank dear, and learn everything. Won't it be fun?"

A young lady who looked upon the acquisition of universal knowledge as an agreeable joke would scarcely be expected to drink very deeply of the Pierian spring. Maude imbibed the classic water in little fitful sips, and wasted a good deal of it in frolicsome splashing; but Francis had read considerably, even in the midst of his London dissipation, and he had a happy knack of remembering what he read. Mrs. Tredethlyn wrote

to a popular librarian for his catalogue; and in the pages of this pamphlet she ticked off the solid works which she considered adapted to the improvement of her own and her husband's mind.

"Merivale's 'History of the Romans under the Empire!'" she exclaimed; "that of course we must read. I'm sure I haven't the faintest idea of Julius Cæsar, except that he always seemed to have a laurel-wreath on his head and a kind of rolling-pin—if I remember right—in his hand, and that he once passed something called the Rubicon, though what it was I haven't the slightest notion. We'll have the 'Roman Empire'; and when we've got through that, we'll have Gibbon in one volume, you know," said Maude, triumphantly; "he'll seem shorter in one volume, even if the small print is rather trying to one's eyes. Newman's 'Phases of Faith'—that sounds like theology, doesn't it? and I don't think we need begin theology yet, because if we got into the early schisms of the Church, and Gnostics, and Arians, and so on, our brains wouldn't be clear enough for Julius Cæsar. There's a life of Madame de Maintenon, by the Duc de Noailles; I think we'll have that: she'll be quite a relief after the 'Roman Empire,' because one has a kind of idea about her, and that she was a nasty old frump, and said rude things about the king, who was so kind to her, and so on."

The selection of these and a great many more books was eminently delightful; but when they came, Maude insisted on dipping into "Roman Empires" and ponderous histories of different ages just as if they had been so many novels; and she frisked among the records of the Reign of Terror with a very confused idea as to the difference between the "Mountain" and the "Gironde," but a vivid notion of Charlotte Corday having her portrait painted just before her death, and Citizen Roland's beautiful wife declaiming on the scaffold.

They were very happy together. If Francis read in real earnest, and his wife only played at reading, they were not the less united in their studies. The industrious honey-bee and the frivolous butterfly may hover about the same flower, happy according to their different natures in the same summer noon. Francis Tredeithlyn and his wife were so happy in the quiet old farmhouse that they let the autumn days drift by them in their moorland retreat, even after the Cornishman had grown strong enough for a new skirmish with Harcourt Lowther, had there been any need of a physical contest between the two men.

"We have been so happy here, Francis," Maude said one dim November evening, as the husband and wife walked side by side upon the moorland before the Grange; "but I think we have

learnt to understand each other so well now, that no one in the world will be able to divide us again. And by-and-by, when you have read a great deal about Julius Cæsar and political economy, and so on, and go into the House"—Maude opened her eyes to the widest extent as she pronounced the high-sounding substantive—"how proud I shall be of you; and I shall go to the Ladies' Gallery when you are going to speak! And then, when you have settled all about the Berkshire estate, how delightful it will be to arrange our model farm, and model stables, and pineries, and vineeries, and conservatories, and orchid-houses, and a model dairy, and a model poultry-yard, almost as pretty as the one at Frogmore! and then how much we shall have to think of and talk about, shan't we, Frank?"

"And you'll never be ashamed of me again, Maude?"

"Ashamed of you!" cried Mrs. Tredethlyn, innocently; "was I ever ashamed of you?" And then she looked at her husband archly, blushing and laughing. "Well, perhaps once, when you knocked those *petits timbales de gibier* into the duchess's lap,—half-a-dozen of them at the very least, Frank; and the night you tore Lady Ophelia Fitzormond's old point: but you are so refined, Frank, so improved, if I may venture to say as much without offending you."

"I should be a churlish brute indeed, if I had not improved in the society of the sweetest wife in Christendom, to say nothing of Julius Cæsar. My great-grandfather was a gentleman, Maude; and there are few names older than Tredethlyn, even in this land of ancient lineages. We dropped down until we came to be represented by my grandfather, who lived like a peasant for the sake of hoarding his money, and in whose steps my uncle Oliver followed. I shall try to make myself a gentleman for your sake, Maude—it would never do for people to say that the lovely Mrs. Tredethlyn had allied herself to a man who was only a clod."

After this, need it be said that all went very smoothly with Mr. and Mrs. Tredethlyn?—so smoothly, that poor discontented Julia abandoned the happy couple in disgust, and went abroad as travelling companion to a rheumatic old countess, who leads her a dreadful life, and insists upon being read to sleep out of German metaphysical works at weird hours of the night. She has met with Roderick Lowther in the course of her travels, lonely and cynical, looking at everything in life through the medium of his own disappointments; for he has sought in vain for a reconciliation with his young wife, and has found to his cost how very firmly a gentlewoman can hold to her resolution, when her firmness is justified by the sense of a deep and deadly wrong.

They are very happy, Francis and Maude. The Berkshire estate is just one of those exceptionally delightful places which drop now and then into the hands of rich commoners when the aristocratic proprietors go to the dogs; and the Stuccoville mansion only sees its owners during the few months in which they skim the cream of the London season, before scudding off to the Continent to improve their minds among the monuments of the past, or in the most fashionable watering-places of the present. They are very happy. As time speeds on, there appears on the lawn in Berkshires a little rolling bundle of white muslin and expensive lace, which, inspected closely, turns out to be a baby, and which, if it could speak at all, would answer to the name of Lionel Hillary Tredethlyn; and by-and-by, when the young couple travel in the bright autumn weather, a prim English nurse and a French *bonne* follow in their rear, and there is a little girl baby in a white hood; and papa and mamma are alike concerned for the safe conveyance of these domestic treasures. The girl baby is called Maude; but she owns a string of other names; and her two godmothers are Susan Lowther, who lives happily with her boy in the Petersham cottage, and Rosa Grunderson, who declares that, in consequence of the distracting influence of public characters, and her fatal experience of the perfidy of private individuals in the person of Roderick Lowther, she will descend a spinster to the grave.

One day, at a German watering-place, Francis and his wife hear of a man living in the same hotel with them, their countryman; a man who is young, has been handsome, and who for the last few months has been conspicuous in the gaming-saloons of the Kursaal as a desperate, and sometimes a very lucky, player—a traveller who can scarcely be an adventurer, for he has been admired and caressed by elegant women and well-born men, but who has been a hard drinker from first to last, and within the last fortnight has fallen a victim to the most hideous disease which vice ever engendered as the scorpion-whip to work its own retribution,—a disease called delirium tremens.

The landlord of the hotel tells Mr. Tredethlyn how this wretched Englishman has his bad fits and his intervals of quiet; how he will lie down calmly enough perhaps at night, to start up mad in the dim grey morning, to walk far out into the country, hurrying wildly before the fiend that pursues him; and to fall exhausted in some desolate spot, and lie there till some passing peasant picks him up and conveys him back to his lodging. The landlord describes, with considerable vivacity and gesticulation, how this poor afflicted creature will sit for hours together catching at imaginary insects that buzz about

him and torment him ; how he will watch and point to falling snow, that never falls ; how with a power that is hideously graphic, he will describe the devils that dance and gibber round his miserable bed. He tells how the shutting of a door, the rustling of a newspaper, the flutter of a falling leaf, will startle this unhappy sufferer more than an unexpected peal of thunder would startle another man. He describes the sleeplessness which no opiate is strong enough to conquer, the restlessness and depression with which medical science struggles in vain. He tells Francis Tredethlyn, in confidence, that the poor ailing wretch is all but penniless, and that very scanty supplies of money come to him in reply to the letters he writes to England now and then in his rational moments.

It scarcely needs Maude's appealing look to inspire Francis with the wish to help this unhappy countryman. He says nothing to his wife, but he goes by-and-by to smoke his cigar in the lamplit quadrangle, where there is a *café*, and a smoking-room, and a reading-room, and a post-office, and a perpetual chatter of divers tongues, and clatter of hurrying feet. He is a long time smoking that cigar ; and yet Maude feels no displeasure in his absence, as she sits alone in her balcony looking out at the lamplit town and the solemn forest looming darkly in the distance. She knows that whatever impulse stirs her own heart is almost sure to find an answering impulse in her husband's ; and she can guess what keeps him so long to-night.

He has spoken to the landlord, he tells her, when he comes back, and has given him a cheque which is to keep things smooth for the present, and has promised more money, if more should be needed ; for in any case the Englishman is not to be worried about money matters while he is ill ; and above all he is not to know that a stranger's help has saved him from annoyance.

"The landlord persuaded me to go into the—poor fellow's room, afterwards," said Francis, slowly. "He thought it would cheer him up a little to shake a countryman by the hand ; and I did go in, Maude,—and I saw him."

"Yes, dear ; and the interview has made you unhappy, I'm sure. You are looking dreadfully pale !"

"The man is very ill, Maude, very ill. Yes, the sight of him did almost knock me over, I assure you."

It was a week after this when Mr. and Mrs. Tredethlyn left the German watering-place. They were on the point of starting from the hotel when Maude noticed the closed shutters of some windows on an upper story, and on questioning one of the waiters, was told that the Englishman was dead. She asked her husband to tell her more about the painful end of this

lonely Englishman, as they sat alone in the coupé of a railway carriage.

"Yes, he is dead, Maude," Francis answered, sadly. "It was a very melancholy fate. The doctors could not conquer the sleeplessness, and he sank at last into a state of coma from which he never rallied. It was a very miserable ending. He will be buried in the little Protestant cemetery. I left all necessary directions, and I have written to his friends in England. Perhaps some one who cared for him will come over to stand beside his grave. He was no friend of mine; but there seems something very shocking in this solitary death in a foreign country."

"He was no friend of yours!" repeated Maude, wonderingly; "how strangely you say that, Frank! You knew him then?"

"Yes, Maude, and you knew him too. The man who died last night was Harcourt Lowther!"

THE END.

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